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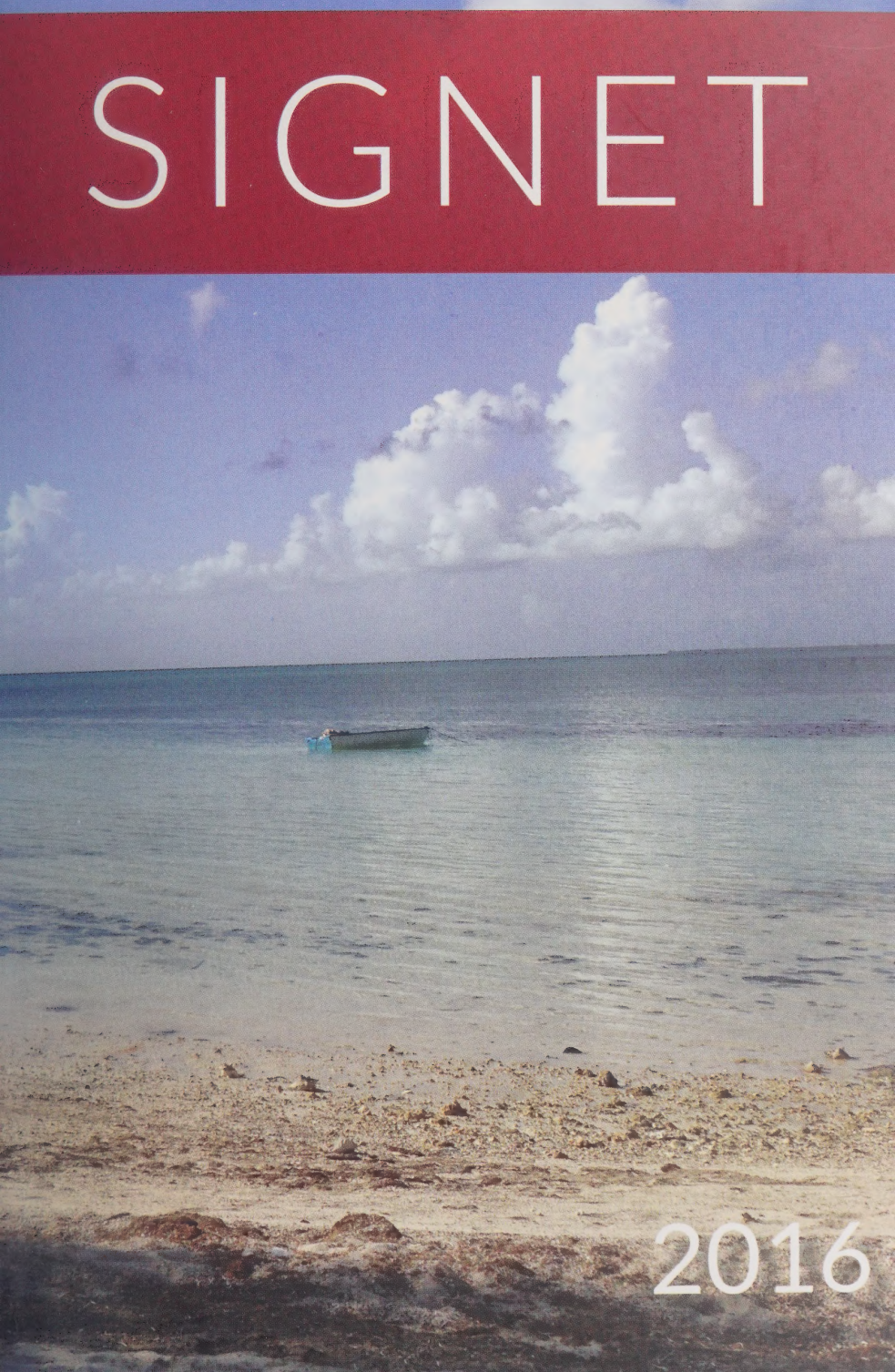

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LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Dear Readers,

I can't believe we're actually at the finish line. Thank you to the entire *Signet* staff for all of their hard work. Y'all were amazing.

Prof. Renfroe and Corrine Watson deserve extra thanks, though. Professor Renfroe, thanks for the guidance and support. You've been a great professor, and a wonderful (if mostly silent) mentor. Your words of encouragement have always meant so much to me. I hated the thought of ever letting you down.

Corrine, thanks for always being on top of things. I don't think we'd have ever gotten any of the paperwork filed if not for you. You were a great junior editor, and you'll be a great senior editor.

This magazine has come to mean a lot to me over the course of three years, and it'll be hard for me to leave it, but I know I'll be leaving it in capable hands.

Until then, enjoy the 2016 *Signet*.

Huong Trinh, Senior Editor

Dear Readers,

It's been a crazy semester, but we made it through. A special thanks to Professor Renfroe. Neither of us are particularly talkative, but your support means a lot. I'd like to thank the *Signet* staff. You guys were dedicated to your work and more than willing to help out. I'd also like to give a shout out to everyone who helped me keep my sanity through all of this and for putting up with all of my snark and sass.

Huong, it's been great working with you this semester. Just be prepared to get about a thousand messages next year when I'm trying to figure out the design. I'm excited to see what's in store for the magazine next year, but we're going to miss having you as our fearless leader.

Corrine Watson, Junior Editor

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INTERVIEW: DR. ROBERT WHALEN

Lora Lassiter

Professor of history Dr. Robert Whalen's fifth book, Murder, Incorporated, is a unique perspective on an old and perhaps familiar story. Dr. Whalen describes it as "a gangster book about philosophy and a philosophy book about gangsters," and in it he discusses the philosophical repercussions of a famous series of New York City mob trials in the early 1940s. These trials have been made into several movies, he says, and there is a Bruce Springsteen song called "Murder, Incorporated" as well. "It's not that the gangsters were philosophers, necessarily," he says, "but that dealing with the gangsters got people to think about some very fundamental issues."

Dr. Whalen's interest in this topic, which contrasts greatly from the subjects of his other works, stems from his childhood in New York state, his pre-existing interest in the Great Depression, and a fascination with the New York City mayor of the time, Fiorello H. La Guardia. He says the project ended up being "bigger and more interesting thing than [he] expected it to be," and that despite criticisms of the odd juxtaposition of gangsters and philosophy, he has pursued the project energetically, and he was not disappointed. "To me what was so interesting," he remarks, "is that you take a collection of hoodlums who are mostly dummies—mean, but dummies—you take a collection of cops who are not so much mean, but they're not philosophers, you take politicians like La Guardia and others, and you put them together and stir 'em up, and you know what? They start thinking about some really serious things: What is justice? Where is justice? What are ethics?"

Dr. Whalen's interest in history comes from a long-standing love of stories. Growing up, he was "plenty booky," and he

particularly liked true stories and the sort of "detective work" that comes with studying history. He enjoys searching for stories, hearing them, seeing them, and writing them down, and he's passionate about proving that history is not boring or irrelevant.

To him, history is a way of thinking. "The connection between today and tomorrow is a fundamental condition of human life," he explains. "Any thinking human being has got to try to connect to today and tomorrow and yesterday." He goes on to say that a person cannot understand events such as the banking crisis or the Confederate flag controversy without understanding the history attached to them.

"The thing that strikes me about history is the potential for imagination," he concludes. "I think that history should pop you out of wherever you happen to be—Charlotte, North Carolina, 2016—and at least for a moment, takes you into some other world. Like with this gangster book—I hope people find that just for a second, they're back in La Guardia's New York."

Dr. Whalen's book, Murder, Incorporated will be available at the beginning of the fall 2016 semester.

SPOTLIGHT: PROF. MIKE WIRTH

Ashley Porven

Mike Wirth is the Assistant Professor for the College of Arts and Sciences at Queens. He has accomplished many versatile forms of art such as infographics, textbook graphics, short films, as well as appearing in comic con shows to create custom comic character portraits. His work can be seen featured on Comedy Central as part of the contest for Design for America. He and fel-low professor, Suzanne Cooper Guasco, created a Candyland game explaining how the Bill of Rights becomes a law, and it was shown on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Along with achieving the privilege of being featured on Comedy Central, Wirth's work also made ways into the Wall Street Journal. McGraw Hill Textbooks has had him create geographical charts and maps along with infographics for science and math for ninth and tenth graders. Currently, he is working on infographics for geometry textbooks. For Wirth, computers aren't just an information system, they are a way for him to show the world what his artistic abilities are capable of. One quote that remains vivid in his memory today is by his grandfather. He said, "Whatever you do, do something with computers."

INTERVIEW: LUKE KUECHLY

Becca Rysewyk

Luke Kuechly, the middle linebacker for the Carolina Panthers, was kind enough to give me an interview. Kuechly was drafted by the Carolina Panthers in 2012. He's from Cincinnati, but went to Boston College and was recognized twice as a census All-American. This twenty-four year old NFL player has been the inspiration of the phrase "Luuuuuke," and has become one of the many heartthrobs of the Panthers.

Q: Most people consider sports to be a means to pay for college, and of course a personally enjoyable pastime. When did you realize football would be career and not enjoyable pastime or means to an end?

LK: I love football. I don't know if it's a pastime anymore—it's more of a job. But I've been playing football since the fourth grade, and cannot imagine life without it. I knew football would be a career option after my sophomore year in college. I had a good season, and knew I had the opportunity to play in the NFL.

Q: How do you handle the pressure in such an intense sport?

LK: You are able to handle the pressure of the sport as a result of routine and preparation. As the week progresses your body recovers from the previous week, and a routine schedule allows you to become comfortable with what you are doing. Preparation is the key for me. You study your opponent like you would study for a test. You review during the week in meetings, on the practice field, and an additional film study after the day is over. That is similar to studying for the test. The Saturday walkthrough is like a final study day, and the test is Sunday in the form of the game.

Q: What is the one football moment you will never forget?

LK: My last game at Boston College; we played down in Miami on Thanksgiving. We won the game and it was my last college game ever. Somewhat of a bittersweet moment.

Q: How does it feel to hear cheers of the team's supporters, especially when they shout "Luuuuuuukkkeee?" And did you understand it right away, or did you think they were booing you?

LK: It's pretty neat. Our fans in Charlotte and the Carolinas are the best. I really enjoy having the opportunity to play here.

Q: How does the team motivate each other at halftime when you're behind on the scoreboard?

LK: Just regroup and fall back on our preparation. Chances are we have seen the different looks that the offense has shown us that week in practice, so it should be nothing new to us. It really comes down to focusing and being in the moment on each play.

Q: What was the best advice you were ever given?

LK: Effort is between you and you.

Q: What is some advice you would give to aspiring players who wish to make it into the NFL?

LK: Understand how your offense or defense works. Have the ability to tell people for what each person on the defense is responsible. It allows you to play faster.

Q: Where do you draw your inspiration?

LK: Wanting to be the best. I personally want to be the best player I can be and put in time and work to get there.

Q: During Super Bowl 50, what were some things running through your mind before, during, and after the game?

LK: Really just focusing on the game plan and the notes I took during the week's preparation. I felt I was prepared, and as long as I focused on my job and understood each situation I could be successful.

Q: With a season of 15-1, what was going through your mind during this (almost) undefeated season?

LK: I really didn't think about it that much. You play each week with the mindset to win. It crosses your mind but everyone in the NFL knows it's about winning the Super Bowl.

Q: What is it like playing for the Carolina Panthers?

LK: It's the best. I feel very fortunate to be in Carolina. The Panthers organization is top of the line from the top down. We have a great locker room, great coaches, and great fans. I couldn't imagine playing anywhere else.

Q: Now that the season is over, what are your plans for your free time?

LK: I enjoy fishing and being outside. I picked up golf last year and hopefully I have an opportunity to get out there and play with some of the guys.

Q: Out of all the cities and places you've been in your life, which has been your favorite and why?

LK: I really enjoy Charlotte. However, Cincinnati is where I grew up and where a majority of my family is. Charlotte is a very close second, but Cincy is still up there for me.

Q: Do you have plans to stay in Charlotte after the season is done, or do you plan on moving back home?

LK: I'll be down in Charlotte getting ready to go for spring practice.

Q: Do you have any activities, other than football, that you enjoy doing?

LK: I really enjoy fishing, being outside, and playing golf.

Q: Of all the ads you have appeared in, which was the one you had the most fun?

LK: CPI is pretty neat. The people at CPI are the best. They are so friendly, and I enjoy working with them.

Q: Do you have a bucket list? And if so, what is number one on that list?

LK: I actually crossed one off this past weekend. I wanted to go to Cameron Indoor to see Duke play UNC.

FOR P.W. MURCH

Lora Lassiter

I walk inside and I hear a hint of music
That has been silent since you walked away.
I've taken everything you taught and used it,
Hoping it would bring you back someday.
The room is dark, and everything has changed
Except for all the things that I remember:
The cello racks and chairs are still the same.
The corners still sport echoes of December
When happy hours passed in happy lives
As we skipped class to play the same old songs,
Ignoring what would come when life arrived.
How could our favorite teacher lead us wrong?
The whole world aches for one who left too soon,
But no place more than this abandoned room.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HATTIE SMITH

Corrine Watson

No one knew what became of little Hattie Smith. I'm sure I knew; but as I grew older, my memories of Hattie seem muddled by childish fantasy. I don't know why I call her little; surely she has grown in the last twenty years. As a child, she was nearly two years older and a whole six inches taller than me, and that's how I remember her. In my head, she remained the immortal vision of an adventurous twelve year old.

When I was a child, there were so many stories around the neighborhood after her disappearance, and I just lost track of which one was true. Katie Harris said that Hattie ran away to marry the Indian prince of Agrabah, but I knew better. Hattie was too young to marry. Girls in movies were at least sixteen when they married princes, and the prince of Agrabah was already married to Princess Jasmine. I always imagined that she might have run away to join the circus. The tents, the smells, the controlled chaos, and the general mystical splendor would have amused her.

As time went on, the parent-generated consensus was that her family moved away without telling anyone. My adolescent mind had trouble accepting this conclusion, and even now, I couldn't seem to remember Hattie having parents. In fact, no one seemed to know exactly where she came from. Hattie Smith just fell into our quiet suburban lives like those vibrant fall leaves, bringing magic and wonder to an otherwise banal life.

I remember sitting at the dinner table a few weeks after I last saw Hattie. It bothered me that my parents could go on eating their spaghetti and meatballs like nothing was amiss, so I asked if they thought she was okay.

Without looking up from his plate, my father said, "Of course she is, Jess."

"But how do you know?" I asked.

"People move all the time."

"But how did she get here, Dad? How could she move if she didn't have a house?"

"What do you mean? I'm sure she had a house."

"No she didn't," I interjected. "She lived in the brush under an old willow tree."

"That's pretend Jess. It's time you learned the difference between fantasy and reality."

My mother gave him a harsh look and assured me that it was sweet that I was concerned for my friend.

"I just want to know what happened to her," I muttered.

"That's not something you need to worry about, love. Finish your dinner."

When I had my own children, I swore that I would never cast aside their concerns so easily. As my daughters got older, I could see the same wonder and wildly creative imagination that I possessed at their age. When I look at them, I see Hattie. I see her giddy carefree adventurous spirit, and as a mother, it pains me to think that one day this will end. Unlike Hattie, I will be there to watch them grow and become too mature for bedtime stories and make-believe. But until then, I am more than happy to chase my little fairies through the same forest where Hattie and I played so many years ago.

I could still see Hattie with her curly blond hair, running with me past my mom's thorny hedges and into the forest. "Keep up," she called, as she looked back at me with those evergreen eyes. When she twirled back into a graceful canter, her hair would swing around and bounce against her back. She would swing her head around and reveal her delicately pointed ears. Most nights, I still go to sleep following those golden curls.

Hattie had lots of friends, but I was the only one she brought to the forest. It was our special secret. At the time, I didn't care to know why she chose me, and now that she's gone, I never

will. I would follow her to the willow tree where we would crawl through the child sized hole in the thorns. My mom was always furious with me for coming back filthy and for getting my nice clothes snagged by branches and thorns. Somehow, Hattie never seemed to acquire one tear in her red dress or a thorn in her bare feet. We would crawl through the narrow tunnel and emerge into a spacious clearing, canopied by foliage.

"Home sweet home," she whispered as she rolled on to a bed of moss.

Things were strange in Hattie's world. Once a blue butterfly landed on my nose, but it had the tiny features of a human girl. When I told Hattie, she simply laughed and carefully removed the creature from my face. This was the summer before I got my glasses, so I can only assume that this illusion was the result of poor vision.

Hattie disappeared on the day she kissed me. It wasn't the type of kiss I received when I got older. Years after she had vanished, her kiss still burned red hot on my cheek. Just the thought of it filled my chest with comforting warmth when I thought of Hattie because when she gave it to me, I was terrified and she made me feel safe.

We were playing in Hattie's thicket when we were startled by the ear piercing screeches that echoed in the distance. Hattie was petrified, and I covered my ears. With terror in her eyes, Hattie said, "They have come for me."

We quickly crawled through the mess of vines, and when we emerged, I caught a glimpse of sharp reptilian claws reaching around the willow tree. Before I could get a better look, Hattie grabbed my hand and pulled me along as she began to run. I stumbled and wheezed as I tried to keep up. Even with me holding her back, Hattie ran agilely through her familiar territory without breaking stride.

When we reached the edge of the forest, we came to a steady halt. I panted like an old dog, but Hattie stood composed. In that moment, she took on an air that made her seem far older than twelve. I looked up into those green eyes and saw the Hattie I knew fade away. She stood up straighter and looked back into

the forest as if she planned to reclaim her territory. Hattie may not have been like the heroes in the stories I read as a kid, but in that moment I could see the "adult switch" flip on inside her brain and this sudden change scared me.

"What should we do?" I asked.

Hattie Smith stood so close to me that I could feel her warm breath on my face. "They've come to take me back," she said seriously. "They've come for me and won't leave until I turn myself over to them. They don't belong here and neither do I." With a trace of her usual splendor, she smiled. "But it was fun while it lasted." Without another word, Hattie pulled me into a tight hug and kissed me on the cheek. Before I could gather my senses, she was already running back into the forest and all I could see was the mass of golden curls bouncing away into the distance. As desperately as I wanted to follow her, my feet remained planted to the spot until my mother called me in for dinner.

The days passed and there was no sign of Hattie Smith. Everyone talked of her sudden disappearance, but no one knew where to look. No one had been to her house or met her family, and after a while, they all stopped caring. Nearly two decades later, I still couldn't forget about that strange little girl.

As I chased my girls through the forest, I found myself back there, staring at the thorny tunnel that lead to Hattie's home. I have grown significantly since the last time I crawled through the tunnel, but I bent down on all fours and began to snap twigs until I could wiggle through. When I stood up in the clearing, I almost imagined her waiting for me on the other side. I could picture her standing there with those messy curls, that red dress, and no shoes. But Hattie was long gone.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of blue wings. As it landed on the patch of moss, I approached it to see if it did have the features of a girl. Before I could get a proper look, it flew through the foliage. Looking back down, I found a vibrant red maple leaf upon the bed of moss. I couldn't explain why there was a single red leaf on the ground in the middle of a green summer, but I couldn't explain Hattie either.

A GALAXY IN YOUR HANDS

Claire Lechtenberg

Let me pour my life into your hands,
And if some words slip through your finger cracks
I won't blame you. I won't blame anyone.
My sentences flow into infinity,
And I see no reason why you can't be infinite too.
My commas, periods, and exclamation points
Claim space in the world on their own.
So like rainwater to the grass,
Please absorb my whispers and let them give you life.
Take my rhetoric and wear it
As a tattoo, permanent on the edges
Of your soft skin. Think of me
When you look at my words and know
I wrote them only thinking of you.
Feel the flow of my voice like a forceful wind,
But don't be scared, my gusts aren't meant for pain.

Let me pour my life into your hands,
But when I'm done promise me I won't be empty.
Share your thoughts with my heart
As flowers share the air. Take my energy
Deep within your soul and create stars,
A sky to illuminate in our dark
A galaxy of gaseous paintings to admire.
Convert my whispers into shouts of life and love.
Turn to my eyes and smile deep,
With pupils that say,
"How can anyone be empty with a heart like yours?"

FUGUE

Delaney Clifford

Nicolai dreamt back to summers with his father. He remembered hiking the mountain trails of the Catskills, stumbling onto the path that the two men would come to know like an old friend. He recalled the burning in his eyes as sweat poured, the rocky fissures unrelenting on his aching feet. Pushing forward, foraging through overgrown brush, the men met the end of the path: an endless expanse of green, where the gusts greeted them one after another. He remembered running through that field together with his father, alive with a second wind. Finally reaching the shore of the lake on the other side and sitting beside his father, the light from the sunset reflected off the water and gleamed brightly in his eyes. He basked in the warmth of the sun, laying back into the inviting arms of the soft, grassy field, and turned to stare at the tree line that never seemed to end. He sat up to take a look at the lake one final time, watching the sun set behind the trees. As the sunlight disappeared, he noticed a glimmer in his father's eyes, a glimmer he'd never seen before, and wouldn't see again for years. Nicolai's father wiped the tear from his cheek, turned to him, and said, "Never forget this moment. Never forget the warmth."

Nicolai snapped back to reality with a horrible groan echoing throughout the remote cabin. Most noises in the cabin were still startling, and even though he had heard this sound before, the haunting moan struck straight through the silence. With the startle, he had dropped his coffee, shattering the mug at his feet. He left the mess and rushed out of the kitchen hurrying towards the bedroom. Victor sat upright over the side of the bed, looking around his feet frantically.

"Where'd it go? I can't find it, I can't find it," Victor muttered to himself.

"Papa, what are you looking for? What did you lose?" Nicolai dropped to his knees to help his father look for the missing object—perhaps a pill, or his glasses.

"My watch, dammit! I just had it! It's original Russian gold, you know," Victor said as he weakly pointed his finger inches away from Nicolai's nose, as if his own son would dare accuse him of falsifying the value of the beloved watch. Nicolai let out a groan of his own as he stood to his feet and shook his head.

"Papa, that watch has been gone for years. You used it to pay for the boat ride to take you and me here, remember?" Nicolai stared into his father's cloudy eyes, begging for the memory, any memory, to resurface. He noticed how those eyes had faded. Victor returned Nicolai's gaze with a puzzled look, frustrated with his son's lack of cooperation, or understanding.

"No, no! I would never give that watch away!" Victor persisted, and returned his searching stare to the floor. "It was my prized possession, given to me by Stalin himself!"

Nicolai did not know the origin of the watch, but he did know that his father was never a communist, and he never met Joseph Stalin. He told Victor that he would look for the watch in the next room, and silently trudged away from the bed, keeping his eyes to the floor the entire way out.

Victor's memory had been getting worse with every passing day, and keeping him trapped in bed seemed to be the only way to keep him safe. His only moments of clarity were born from frustration and anger, in general Russian fashion. Other than those moments, most of his days were spent sleeping, or wandering aimlessly around the cabin, repeating the same questions over and over, helplessly muttering to himself. Victor's voice echoed from the doorway.

"Did you find it, Nicolai? Did you find it? It's my most prized—"

"I know, Papa. Your most prized possession. I'll keep looking..." But of course, Nicolai knew there was nowhere else to look. What could Victor see that wasn't the sparse interior of the cabin? Perhaps the blown-out interior of an apartment, his old bones

and crepe-paper skin feeling the chill of a harsh Russian winter instead of a mountain snowfall. Or maybe he was somewhere earlier, back home with his wife, before she was a mother, looking for the last relic of his military days, torn between the comfort of peace and the familiarity of wartime. Gripping the bar stool and sliding it out to sit, Nicolai knelt his elbows on the kitchen counter and placed his head in his hands as he thought back to the past two months; all of the endless questions, the nonsensical run-on sentences, the days that left Nicolai sleepwalking through his life, finally trudging to the couch each evening. He heard his father's tone begin to dull, returning to the mindless repetition he had grown so accustomed to. As he tuned out the soft muttering, he re-turned his stare to the window, imagining the long gone oak tree outside still standing tall, still set ablaze with the sunset, the reds and yellows of autumn exploding through the open window. But the tree was gone. No leaves remained to burst brightly in the heat of an autumn evening. Only the barren stump of the tree Nicolai had used for firewood the winter before.

Nicolai was pulled from his daydream yet again by the sounds of Victor's shuffling footsteps across the hardwoods.

"Did you find your watch?" Nicolai asked without looking up from the kitchen counter.

"What watch? Watch? What watch?? Watch... Watch..." Victor grumbled, scratching his balding head.

"That's what I thought," he said as his lip quivered. "Alright, Papa, do you want your dinner?" He sighed and turned to his father, who had wandered towards the sliding glass door overlooking the woods.

"Papa, I asked if you wanted any dinner." Nicolai raised his voice and caught the attention of Victor, who spun around with surprising speed for an eighty three year old man, and looked at Nicolai with a stare that the young man didn't quite recognize. It was the gaze a man wore when returning to a place he had not seen in years. A look of wonder, as if his surroundings were brand new again, trying to figure out how he had come to that place for the first time at all, so many years ago.

"No... no. Bed. Bed," Victor whispered as he looked at Nicolai.

"Okay, Papa, bed sounds good," Nicolai said as he began to walk over to his father, but Victor had already made it half way across the living room towards the hallway. Nicolai followed closely behind, watching his father struggle to climb under the covers on his own. Nicolai made it just in time to bring the sheets up to Victor's chin. Nicolai smiled down at his father, who stared blankly out the window.

"Goodnight, Papa. Sleep well," Nicolai said lightly, and began to move out of the room. It wasn't before he had heard his father's voice that he realized his wrist was caught in his Victor's hand.

"Wait... Not... yet." Victor struggled to speak, but he managed those words as he looked his son in the eye.

"Okay, Papa. I'm here. Don't worry," Nicolai reassured his father. He pulled the ottoman beside the old oak bed and sat.

"Do you remember the summer?" Victor asked. "Do you remember it?"

"Which one, Papa?" He leaned closer to hear his father's fleeting words.

Victor seemed to lose his thought, and looked away from Nicolai, back out through the window to the lake, frozen and black, pitched against the white surrounding. Nicolai heard his father whimper, and then speak up again.

"Do you remember... the summer? Running... fields in the... mountains? Do you remember it, young one?" Still turned away, Victor's voice rose.

"Yes I remember, Papa. I remember the summers," Nicolai's eyes lit up at the sound of his father's voice—his true voice. He leaned in even closer to hear any remaining words, but his father's eyes had drifted away. The moment was gone, and Nicolai stood from the seat. He brought the sheets back to his father's chin, feeling the smile on his face fade to a grimace as he left the room.

The next morning, Nicolai woke up and moved slowly to his father's door, gripping the knob with caution. Letting out a deep sigh, shutting his eyes and weakly raising his other hand, he knocked, and then proceeded to open the door to his father sitting upright in the bed.

"Papa?" Nicolai spoke lightly.

Victor grunted, turning slowly towards the doorway, doing his best to swing his legs over the side of the bed and faltering, he barely caught himself on the bedside table as Nicolai rushed to his aid.

"Papa, are you okay?!" Nicolai asked, breathlessly.

Victor panted, his eyes shut tight, his wispy gray beard hairs fluttering in and out of his lips.

"Papa, can you hear me?!" Nicolai drew his face close to his father's, looking for a sign. Victor's breathing slowed to a normal, ragged level, but he kept his eyes shut tightly. He exhaled deeply and managed to lay back down in the bed with Nicolai's help.

"See, you're okay now. You're okay, Papa," Nicolai said reassuringly.

Victor mumbled something that his son couldn't hear, but when Nicolai didn't acknowledge the low grunt, Victor moved his hand to Nicolai's and asked again.

"Thank you... nice boy... nice... uhm... erm..." Victor whimpered meekly as his eyes searched for an answer, not from Nicolai, but an answer he had lost inside himself. Nicolai sat beside his father silently, his eyes widening as the air was sucked from the room. He met his father's eyes and stared, shutting the entire rest of the room from his sight, feeling the fire well up behind his eyes.

"It's me, Papa. It's Nicolai," Nicolai choked the words out, staring intently, but he was not met with the eyes of his father.

"Who? I'm... I'm sorry." Victor repeated.

The old man's gray eyes had grown even lighter, and as Nicolai's expression became entirely blank, still begging for the answer within his own father, he saw a single tear form in Victor's left eye and run down his cheek.

Nicolai's hands trembled at his sides. The air caught in his chest as he tried to speak, only allowing short gasps. His heart bled as every knife of every forgotten memory plunged deeper still. Nicolai did not move. He only stared at the weak shadow facing him.

His own eyes still wide, Nicolai turned away from the lost eyes of his father, staring only at the lake, imagining the black

water underneath, enough to sweep the entire mountain away, enough to drown everything. Nicolai's eyes met the floor as he felt his neck go limp, letting his head swing forward. He stood from the bed and walked away through the old doorframe, down the hallway, past the kitchen, through the front door, making his way from the cabin down the hill towards the lake. Nicolai's bare feet crunched upon the frozen ground as he staggered, knowing greater pain with each step, losing breath after breath. Nicolai collapsed into the snow before reaching the lake, feeling the stinging cold of the ice washed away by the tears burning hot against his face.

BARE FEET

Danielle Price

I stood in my workshop unsure where to start. I promised her I would build the casket myself. I've been a woodworker for thirty-five years, but I tend to make things for the living. Tables to eat on, beds to sleep in, and cabinets to house all those collected trinkets. How do you start to build something to put your wife in? I sat down on the bench that was pushed up against the side of the shop. I had been spending a lot of time in here lately. It's easier to be here than home. Home is where her aprons hung on nails, unwashed and her clothes lay in a basket by the dryer. I looked down at my stained and weathered hands, folded tightly in my lap. My wedding band felt thick between my fingers. I twisted it back and forth, kicking at the dirt under my boots. Yes. If someone was going to build Caroline's casket it would surely be me.

It was windy the day I met her. Her long blonde hair tangled down to her waist and I watched as she rolled a joint in the middle of the park. She looked like everything I loved about summer. The way the sun drenched her hair and how the wet grass stuck to the bottoms of her bare feet. She smelled like coconut suntan lotion. She pressed her lips to the glass kombucha bottle and she smiled when she caught me staring.

"Can I have a hit?" I sat down next to her.

She laughed. "Sure, baby."

We smoked three joints total that afternoon. Her voice danced around like tiny ballerinas in a music box as she told me her life.

She lived in a 1967 Frolic camper because she hated being locked down. She had two dogs, Pete and Mollie. There is no food she wouldn't try with the exception of veal, because what kind of monstrous person would eat a baby cow. She hated her parents

and she hadn't seen them in years.

"What about school?" I asked her.

"It's not really for me." She rolled onto her stomach in the grass.

"Yeah... I'm thinking it's not for me either." I said quietly, realizing the truth. Four semesters in at a university and I was on the verge of being kicked out.

"So what is for Jonathan?" Caroline twirled two blades of grass around her thumbs.

"Not accounting."

"You don't look like an accountant," she agreed. "Just don't decide to be a cop, okay?" She laughed and lit up another joint.

I didn't become a cop, but I did marry her. Two years from that day in the same spot. We took our vows barefoot.

About a year after we got married, Caroline came home early. A storm caused power outages all across town. She ran through the door soaking wet. Her clothes clung to every curve of her body. I was in the kitchen watching her; she walked towards me stripping off her jeans, jacket, and t-shirt. The lightening shone between us and the thunder roared outside

"Jonathan, dance with me," she said grabbing my hand.

"Sure, baby." I held her naked body close and let the rain from her hair drip down my arms. She rested her head on my shoulder hummed a tune from James Taylor's new album. It was just us and the rain dancing barefoot in the kitchen.

Then there was the night I thought she left. I couldn't find her anywhere in our two bedroom, six hundred square foot house. I went outside and found her perched in a black walnut tree.

"Caroline, what the hell are you doing up there?" I yelled at her.

"Smoking," she said laughing.

"Well, smoke on the ground dammit!"

"Come up here with me?" she asked.

I could see her hazy blue eyes from six feet off the ground. She had me.

"Sure, baby." I climbed up next to her in the tree.

I wasn't a fan of heights and she knew that. She laughed as I

heaved myself up the tree, clinging to every branch like my life depended on that alone.

"Almost there," she whispered when I was just close enough to grab her hand. She helped me to the limb she was on. I stared at her, out of breath.

"You're beautiful." I cupped her chin into my palm. Her blue eyes were glowing that night. She smiled and put her arm around me. She turned and straddled the limb, motioning for me to do the same.

"You're crazy. I'm not dangling myself like that." My legs were shaking and I had half my body pressed up into the body of the tree.

"Come on." She nudged my side.

"No, Caroline." I wouldn't look at her. "You're lucky I'm up here to begin with."

"Jonathan, let's be dangerous!" She threw her arms up in the air.

I couldn't help but laugh. She was a perfect gypsy. I'm just lucky enough she took me along for the ride.

I realized then there was nothing more fitting for Caroline to be buried in then that very tree. Of course it had to be the black walnut tree. We kissed in that tree, laughed in that tree, and Caroline fell out of that tree twice in one weekend. I'm not sure why I didn't think of it sooner. I grabbed the chainsaw from the shop and swung it up over my shoulder. The tree sat in our backyard in Boone, North Carolina. It had to be hundreds of years old. The branches were so thick you could lie on them, and we had. One branch would be enough; it had to be the third one from the bottom. That's where we talked about the real stuff... and this was as real as it would get.

The doctor gave her two years, but the bone cancer gave us one. It consumed us. A shadow in every conversation, every occasion, and every moment. Every holiday wondering if it would be the last, every new season wondering if it was the last spring to see the tulips bloom or if it would be her last first snow of the season. Last January, I found her a crumpled heap on our

bathroom floor.

"Caroline! What's wrong?" I asked rushing to her side.

She was thin and frail like a doll that sat on a shelf.

"I can't do this Jonathan," she cried into my arms.

"You can... I know you can." I held her tightly. You have to.

She shook her head and looked at me. I knew what she wanted. I knew she couldn't take anymore of the chemo. It was drowning her.

"Please?" She whispered so softly I could barely hear her.

"Sure, baby." Tears fell off my face like the rain pounding on our roof. No.

I had been working on the casket now for three days straight, leaving the shop only for coffee. It had to be the most beautiful piece I had ever made. I sanded the wood until the grain was smooth and accented in all the right places. I brushed the poly on in neat strokes watching the wood come to life under my brush. When it felt done, I sat down on the bench.

The room felt so empty with the vacant walnut casket. Then there was me.

CONSIDER THE RAVENS

Jeffrey Scott

Regarding musical thoughts—consider
The difference between thoughts and the ones who
Think them.
    Through meticulous study, through
Expression, we thinkers rage and condemn
Stark thoughtlessness.
        To impose on mayhem,
Order—that is our aim, our daily stress,
Our pang-laden dreamscape.
            If we should guess,
God might be mayhem—leaves stretched in no shape
While we stand mean on wrathful roots.
                That scrape,
Which our thoughts brace against the gentle fruits
Of our bodies and spirits, is music.

Consider the ravens—thoughtless and whole,
Scolding our scrape with their symphonic squall.

THE HOUSE ON CHESNUT LANE

Danielle Price

The house on Chestnut Lane, you said it wasn't worth the time.
But I made you look anyways. The weeds were tall in the yard,
And the roof was caving. The door sat crooked and walls were scarred.
Then I watched as your eyes met the muscadine vine.

Its hearty vines mingled between the fence posts
And pushed through the long forgotten pergola.
Your hands grazed the bulging tangled roots
And I was silent, as you marveled each flowering bud.

"Grandma had one like this," you said after awhile.
I nodded and waited for you
To tell me a story I already knew.
But the story never came and you walked away with a smile.

RUNAWAYS

McKenzie Teter

He packed his bags with the road essentials: clothes, enough instant coffee to keep him awake for months, every CD he owned, and all the cash he could withdraw at one time. Henry knew he was not a man of excessive possessions but he was still shocked by the amount of room left in his car. As he grabbed his last duffle bag off the front steps of the house, he was overcome by the yearning for one last look. He pushed open the front door and had to stop himself from walking in out of habit. The silence was all but inviting. This former living, breathing home, with a pulse made up of footsteps and conversation, had flatlined. Standing in the doorway of the skeleton that once was his life, Henry envied the people who would soon be making memories on top of his. He closed and locked the door before the tears could escape his eyes and tossed his bag in the passenger seat. He told himself over and over he wouldn't look back after pulling away but still caught him-self watching as the for sale sign stamped "Sold" waved him off in the rearview mirror.

After only making it a few towns over, Henry's stomach began to protest against the idea of starting his trip hungry. He noticed a worn down diner attached to a Shell gas station right before his exit on to the highway and decided to stop to fill up his car and himself.

The place was busy, wall to wall lined with truckers inhaling cups of coffee and waitresses dressed in uniforms from the forties, all looking old enough to be born then too. He approached the old fashioned bar and took a seat on the barstool that was as uncomfortable as it looked. The menu was everything he expected it to be, so he stuck with the simple cheeseburger, fries, and Coke.

Moments later, the little bell above the door rang and in walked a young girl, dragging duffle bags filled with what seemed to be her entire life. She piled her bags behind a cherry red barstool and took a seat, leaving an empty space between them. He chuckled to himself when he overheard her order the kid's chicken fingers basket because this girl had to be no younger than twenty. She shot him a look, acknowledging she heard his laughter.

"Scared somebody'll raid your car?" Henry joked.

She glanced over her shoulder at the pile of bags. "Don't have one. I was walking to the train station but I needed a breather."

"Where you headed?"

She turned to face him completely now. She looked younger in the face than he originally pegged her to be—a pretty girl though. Her expression turned almost shocked when she really looked at him before turning away abruptly.

"Canada," she replied, gulping down half her glass of water. "You?"

"Washington. The state, not DC."

The waitress passed by, dropping their checks in front of them. He slid some cash out of his wallet and laid it on the check but noticed the girl eyeing hers with concern. She thumbed through her wallet, biting her lip.

"I got it," he said, reaching for the bill.

"No, no please. I'm fine," she insisted.

"Suit yourself but at least let me drop you off at the station. That's too much to be walk-ing with."

He helped carry the heavier bags to his car as she stood on the curb, biting her nails. When he bent over to grab the last bag, he noticed the girl twirling her thumb over the top of a pepper spray keychain. She didn't say anything, just simply raised one eyebrow, which was warning enough for Henry.

The trip to the train station was only two miles out of Henry's way so he wasn't too upset about the setback. He even offered to help unload her bags once they arrived but she declined sharply. The hustle and bustle of travelers rushing along forced them to shout when they spoke.

"Thanks for the ride and for not kidnapping me," she said.

"No problem. Thanks for not stealing my stuff. It was nice to meet you–"

"Jessie," she finished for him.

"Nice to meet you, Jessie. I'm Henry, by the way."

"Thanks again, Henry."

Henry drove around the one-way street to exit but made the spilt second decision to pull into the parking lot facing the train station entrance. He had a feeling this girl had no idea what she was doing. He watched what seemed like a thousand faces filter in and out of those doors but none of them looked familiar. Suddenly his conscious snapped, What are you doing? What do you care about this girl for? She's leaving and you should be too. He let out a long sigh. He checked his rearview mirror before backing out but spotted Jessie dragging herself and her belongings though the automatic doors. She melted into the nearest bench. Henry attempted to get her attention by laying on the horn. She perked up but looked utterly confused when she noticed him waving her over. He rolled down his window as she approached.

"I had a bad feeling about you kid. What happened?"

"I don't suppose you have $430 you're willing to give to a complete stranger?" The look of defeat on her face implied it wasn't okay for him to laugh. "What are you still doing here?"

"I couldn't get that close to where you wanted to be, knowing you might be stuck here. I'm headed to Mount Vernon, about an hour from the Canadian border. It's a long way and I wouldn't mind a few naps. Can you drive?"

"I'm twenty, not ten."

"Noted. I can get you to where I need to be, if you think you can figure it out the rest of the way."

Before he could finish his sentence she was already hopping into the passenger seat.

Miles blurred, like the moments in life that don't seem significant enough to remember, in the silence between Henry and Jessie. The only words uttered came from Jessie reading

the "Thank you for visiting..." and "Welcome to..." state signs aloud after every border. The GPS indicated the ride would take twenty-five hours, if driven straight through, but after four hours and not even making it into yet Idaho, Henry broke the trend. He put a cigarette between his lips and extended the pack to her.

"No thank you. I just quit," she declined.

"Good for you, I just started," he managed between puffs.

She cracked her window just enough to let the smoke escape into cleaner air.

"So who is Henry? I want to hear all about him."

"Well," he began but not before taking a moment to ponder how much he wanted to reveal to this young stranger. "I'm thirty-two, recently separated and hoping to find some peace in the mountains."

"Separated? Sounds messy. What about the wife?"

"We were never married, together for ten years but not married. We met in Chicago in the spring semester of our junior year of college. She's from there. We fell in love the old fashioned way, with face-to-face conversation and holding hands every chance we got. I swear all we ever did was talk. The stories were never too much and never enough. We were endless to each other."

Jessie shifted uncomfortably in her seat, "Did you ever want to be married or have kids?"

"I did. Jen—that's her name—she always wanted to be warm, so after we graduated, I moved us to Arizona. She shot down all three of my proposals and has been on birth control ever since we met." He made the mistake of pausing, giving himself too much time to remember. "She left for Chicago last month, back to her parent's or her sister's maybe. I finally sold the house and decided I needed go somewhere too. I hope she's cold up there."

Jessie didn't respond, leaving Henry to sit in the fog of his own words. As the conversation faded, so did she. The sun had abandoned the sky hours ago while Jessie surrendered to her fight against her eyelids, slipping into sleep. Henry was left alone with the stars he couldn't see and the sound of her breathing.

Idaho passed them by in the dark, with nothing more than rest area stops and bathroom breaks (more Jessie's fault than Henry's) but now here they were, climbing through the northeast corner of Oregon in the refreshing light of the rising day.

"Pull over!" Jessie exclaimed suddenly but before Henry could react she was bent over in the passenger seat gaging.

"Jesus, hold on!" he yelled, frantically swerving off onto the highway shoulder.

She rushed out of the car only to make it a few steps before throwing up all over the ground in front of her. Henry had to look away but that didn't save him from the sound. Minutes passed until the agony came to a close. She came back to the car, pale and shivering. Henry already had a bottle of water and her toothbrush ready. A few steps from her own sickness, Jessie proceeded to rinse out her mouth. She climbed back into the car without saying a word.

"That was the classiest thing I've ever seen," Henry joked.

Her look didn't imply that she found it funny.

"Sorry," he said beginning to pull back onto the highway, "So, who is Jessie?"

"Well apparently she's sick," she relaxed in her seat, "but besides that, I'm twenty, grew up as a ward of the state of Arizona, was put out on the streets after I aged out and I'm looking for a fresh start up north."

"A runaway, huh? That's dangerous."

"Everyone wants to run away. Look at us, climbing the country, looking for new homes. You and everybody else are no different from me. Some use vacations, some college, others just up and go for good. We're all runaways."

Henry had no response but instead left her words float in his mind. He liked the way she sat comfortably in silence.

They made the unanimous decision after reaching Washington to switch places. Henry enjoyed being able to appreciate the scenery, stretch out his limbs, and sleep a bit. The sky was the color he wished it could be forever, pure blue. As he watched the mountains rise and fall behind a cascade of every shade of

green, he liked that he could understand why it was called "the evergreen state" from firsthand experience. Jessie wore her glasses when she drove, which oddly complimented her face in a way they didn't to other people. She was nodding her head and humming along to "Into the Mystic" by Van Morrison, one of the many songs on the playlist she had thrown together while Henry was driving. He leaned his seat back as far as the bags behind him would allow and closed his eyes for the first time in days.

Henry was jolted awake by the feeling of gravel under the tires. It took a moment for his sleep-induced confusion to fade before noticing blue and red lights flickering in the side mirror. He turned to Jessie, who simply mouthed "sorry."

Out of the squad car emerged a man with dark sunglasses and a darker scowl. He approached the car and leaned down to Jessie's open window.

"Do you know how fast you were going, young lady?"

"Too fast, I guess."

Without so much as cracking a smile he continued, "Twelve over. License and registration."

Henry took this chance to interject, "I'm sorry, officer. This is my car. I was just letting her drive so I could take a break. We're coming from Arizona."

"License and registration from you both then."

In the moment as they both searched for their IDs, Henry caught a glimpse of Jessie's. Her smile was soft without teeth. She passed their information to the officer who then returned to his car.

"Seneca Woods, huh?" Henry laughed.

She stiffened in her seat. "What?"

"Seneca Woods, that's a pretty fancy neighborhood right? That's the address on your ID. Must have been a pretty nice foster home."

The officer returned more frantically than before. "I'm going to need you both to step out of the car."

"Why? Is there a problem?" Henry asked.

"Step out of the car, sir."

The officer immediately pursued Henry, forcing his hands behind his back. "Henry Lowe, you are under arrest for the abduction of Jessica Garland. You have the right to remain silent. Everything you say can and will—"

"What? Who's Jessica Garland? Officer, please this has to be a mistake!"

But as the words left his mouth, Henry looked to Jessie who was taking in the situation with a look of panic.

"Jessie? Jessie, tell him what's going on. I didn't kidnap you!"

She stood stone cold, looking right through him.

The police officer handcuffed Henry and escorted him back to the squad car. He told Jessie to stay where she was and that he would come back to speak with her. She didn't reply. Henry had stopped his fighting and assured himself that this was all one big misunderstanding and that Jessie would help him explain the story when she had the chance to calm down. After being lowered into the back of the car, he heard the officer shouting and running towards the road. Through the windshield he could see Jessie sprinting into the woods.

Henry sat in questioning room of the police station, his mind clouded by the fog between fantasy and reality. The police chief entered and took a seat across from Henry. He offered Henry a cup of coffee and a cigarette, both of which he took.

"Can someone please tell me what's going on?" Henry demanded after a few hits.

"How did you meet Jessica Garland, Mr. Lowe?" the police chief asked, ignoring his previous question.

"I didn't meet 'Jessica Garland,' I met Jessie. She told me she was headed up north after the foster care system aged her out. I was just trying to help, she seemed lost."

"Well she was most definitely not a foster kid. Jessica Garland is the only child to Mark and Miranda Garland. Her father is a successful lawyer and her mother a well-esteemed dermatologist from North Rim, Arizona. Jessica had been having a secret affair with her high school history teacher and panicked when he suggested they tell her parents. She soon ended the affair, telling

the teacher no one would believe his story even if he told. She broke things off and kept the secret to herself until she began feeling sick in the mornings and missed her monthly cycle. Jessica then made the plans to flee to Canada before her parents could find out about the affair or her teacher about her pregnancy. She left while her parents were away for a long weekend, vacationing in Key West. They returned home Monday night to find her room cleaned out and her missing. Somewhere along that timeline she became tangled up with you, Mr. Lowe, and that's the part we're trying to figure out."

Henry sat in silence for a moment, trying to force himself to believe them. "So where is she now?"

"We haven't found her yet but we'll keep looking."

SCIENTIFIC MUSINGS IN THE GRASS

Jeffrey Scott

Bones colliding with bones,
Mechanisms within skin,
Muscles and fibers, tissues and strands,
Cells colliding with cells, membranes with membranes,
particles with particles.

DNA crinkles and stretches under giant muscular pumps and
blood canals.

Protons and electrons shout with rage and fire
Against the vengeful quarks
And whatever docile monsters they dominate
In our bowels and tendons.

The monsters whisper,
Waiting,
Wishing that energy consumes their bodies.

The energy bubbles underneath,
Guiding effervescent destinies toward some end.

The energy is governed by indefinable qualities.

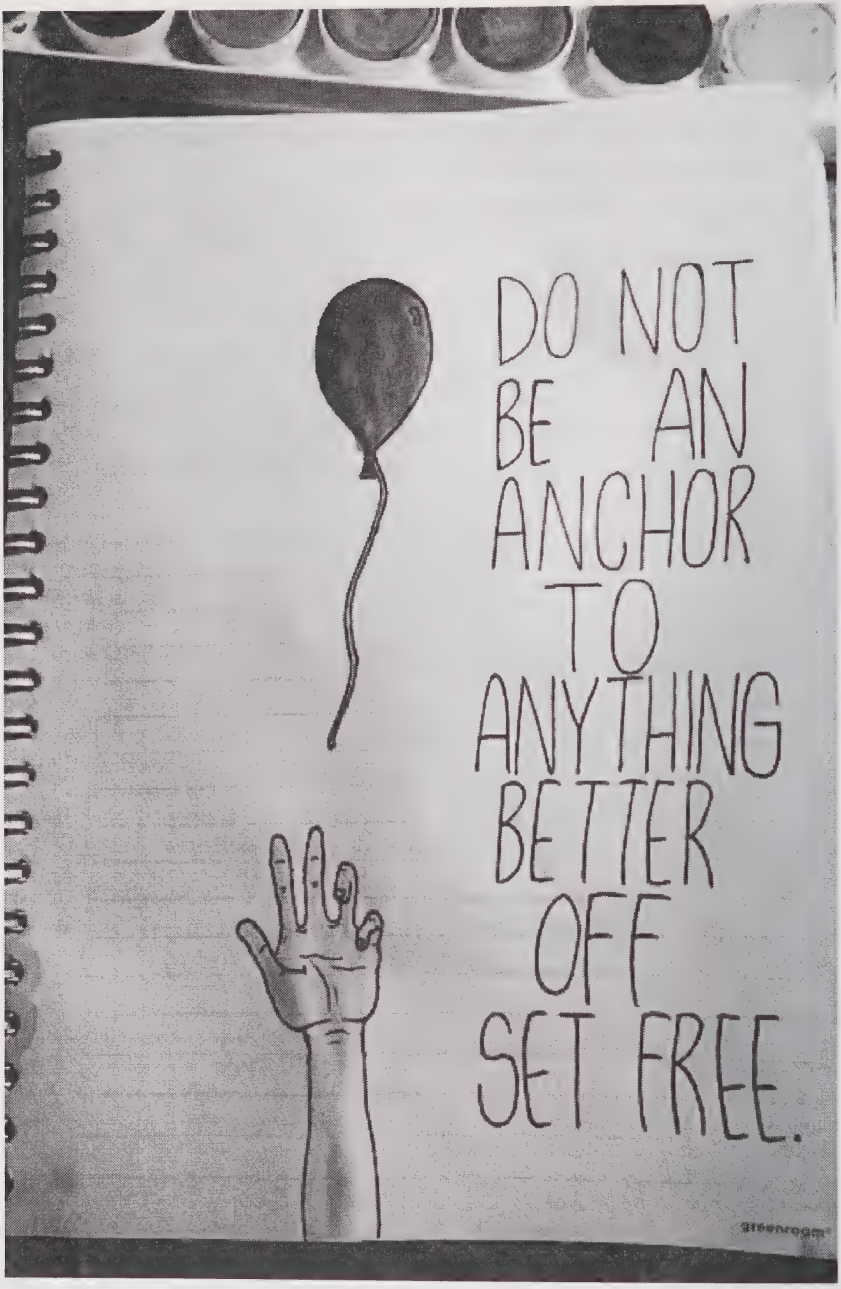
Electricity flits between things and sings to the tune
Of those indefinable qualities.

I think they are wishes and astrological identities.

I think they mean no harm, though they often cause it.

I think my brain is full of them.

I think I feel them pulsing as she lays her head on you
Laying your head on me
Laying our bodies in the grass.



SURRENDER YOUR CAPTIVES
Brianna Imbrogno

FRENCH WAKE-UP CALL

Amber Earley

When I first began planning my trip to Strasbourg, France, I couldn't stop thinking about the culture I would embed myself into. The wine, the people, the passion. I expected to have experiences that would help my writing, meet people who could eventually become characters in my stories. I was going to finally have a chance to romanticize my life the way I romanticize everyone else's. I mean, hey, it was France.

My first week in Strasbourg was definitely one of the scariest I'd ever had. Living on my own was entirely different from being on a different continent than everyone I knew, and I had never been in a place in which English was not the prominent language. Luckily, some of the French speak it, but most of the time if you stopped and asked someone how in God's name the tram worked, they would look at you with a mixture of pity and confusion, and shrug their shoulders. This is the opposite of where I came from.

In America, even the Spanish and Asian sectors had English translations by everything. Everyone used the same currency and the Fahrenheit system (seriously, why do we insist on being different when it's so inconvenient?), and if the price of gas fluctuates by a dime, it was big news. In France, it's entirely different. If you didn't speak French, good luck maintaining your vegetarian diet, or getting the cheapest plug adapter, or asking for help of any kind. Make sure to plan your trips ahead if you wanted to take a fifteen euro flight to England, because while they're part of Europe, they don't use the same currency. When it's sweltering outside, people complain about 35 degree weather. It took me longer than I'd like to admit to figure out that 35 is really hot in Celsius.

I don't read many travel guides. I don't do much research on

other cultures unless it's pertinent to whatever I happen to be writing at the time, and I generally forgot whatever it was that I learned as soon as I didn't need it anymore. Hell, sometimes I forgot it while I was still writing about it. I'd like to think I'm open-minded, but when it comes to other cultures, I'm not much of a taste tester, and that's okay. The problem is that in being that kind of person, I will surely limit myself by not jumping on every opportunity that comes my way because it might be "too" dif-ferent. Culture shock is scary, of course, but it's no reason to cut yourself short.

So yeah, back home I might be considered very open-minded—a free spirit, someone who needs to travel and not be tied down by anything. In fact, I love the idea of people seeing me that way. That's the way I try to live. But when it came to traveling outside of the States, I got a little gun-shy. I retreated into this shell called "Amber" and tried to comfort myself with binge-watching American shows on Netflix and consuming an alarming amount of soda and potato chips. After about a week and a half, I actually considered eating a hamburger with beef in it, just to try and make myself feel like I was in America again—before I reminded myself that even in America I don't eat beef.

When I first began planning my trip to Strasbourg, France, I was so focused on what everyone else would be like that I completely overlooked one of the most important parts about studying abroad: learning what I was like. Learning what it truly meant to be an American, which I was oddly ashamed about when I arrived. Being American doesn't have to be a bad thing. It doesn't have to mean guns, bald eagles, and oppression. It doesn't have to mean capitalism or a ratty-haired, snaggle-toothed, pro-standardized-testing education system. Being from America means so much more than that.

It means open-mindedness, as diversity built our country. It means hard work, as capitalism really doesn't give us another choice. It means nostalgia, and the importance of making memories at almost any cost. This is what France taught me about myself. I may not exactly be the poster child of America, but I'd be lying (and pretty ignorant) if I said that where I'm from didn't

help shape who I am, and what I consider to be "the norm."

I thought I came to France to learn about the French, about people from all different parts of the world with different mindsets who would give me experiences I'd never forget. Perhaps this is indicative of my true nature. I value memories like the French value good wine, and that is my favorite thing that I learned about myself this past month. I suppose that's why I'm a writer.

When I came to Strasbourg, France, I had no idea that I would learn more about myself than how to properly pronounce the word "croissant." And that level of self-discovery, that intimacy with oneself, that is the true magic of traveling.

AMORY BLAINE AND ROMANCE

Calista Malone

I unpacked my books,
Five months after I unshelved them from his spine.
And I stored them in between each of my ribs
So that I'll stand a little taller.
I'm holding onto Fitzgerald's words
Until I fully believe them.

"...the sentimental person thinks things will last."
& I used to,
Until I realized that they don't.
You asked me to move in,
& I unpacked all my stories.
But you didn't like their endings.
So I ate their words until I only became more sick.
You weren't ready when I threw them back up.

"...the romantic person has a desperate confidence that they won't."
Amory Blaine says,
& now I believe him.
Because I've been given enough reasons to know he's right.
I should have moved out when you stopped reading my books,
But I had a confidence you would pick them up again.
You didn't.
And now I have a confidence you never will.

A SENSE OF LIBERATION

Sydney Lear

Summer is my favorite season. Not for petty reasons like being away from the classroom and homework, but because of the life that lives within it. I love summer for the incomparable energy that blazes in its heat and the color it threatens to burn on your skin. No other season can equate to the energy in every moment of summer. From the morning chill, as it energizes itself for its full potential, to the intensity of the afternoon sunshine, all the way to the vibrant light of the stars as they gleam in the deceiving stillness of night. But nothing about a summer night is actually still. On the surface, night seems calm, almost vacant. It feels like everything's been put away. But, within the thick forests lay chirping bugs and creatures resting in preparation for a new day. In the fields, the crickets run, unfazed, as it seems, by the lack of light. Bats soar above your head like they're in a whole different world. The cicadas sing their songs proudly. The air feels slightly lighter until the chilled breeze hits you. The grass needles its way between your toes as you walk—a comforting feeling I've come to count on during my nightly walks to the stars.

This past summer I spent countless nights lying below the stars in a field behind my house. The way there was a walk I knew very well. That field was positioned between two different woods, both of which were very familiar to me. I knew all the trails within those woods because my neighbors and I had made them ourselves. I knew where the streams began. I knew all the rumors about the ghosts inside the forts my older sister's generation made. I knew the best way to get in and out. I knew exactly how many seconds it would take me to get home in case I was running late for dinner. I knew every tree, every bush, and every rock. But until this last July, I had never realized the sheer beauty that

immerged right outside the last tree after 11 p.m.

The routine was similar every night. I would get home, making it a point to be extra loud coming in the house so my mom would feel comfortable enough to fall asleep. I would wait a couple of minutes just to be sure, and then I would sneak out the back door and out onto the deck. I could smell the potent aroma of basil from the plants my mom had potted beside the doors. The sheer thought of the fragrance makes me smile. It reminds me of home. I always felt a sense of liberation the moment I stepped away from the house. It was a freedom that I'm convinced only comes from being eighteen and sneaking out. I ran down the hill in my backyard toward the field. I was always barefoot. I have this thing against shoes in the summer. I would look up at the sky, wondering how clear it was that evening. As I approached the field, I scanned for my usual spot on the ground. There was a slight hill, which made lying down on the hard ground a strange type of comfortable. With my eyes as wide as the sky, I lie there with my head tilted upward. Enamored, I took everything in. It was free entertainment.

The stars amazed me. They were yet dim, colored yet colorless. They were so far away yet I felt like I could touch them if my arm were just a little bit longer. They twinkled like the song and they moved like a bullet. The more I looked, the more I realized I could see. Their canvas was so vast that I gazed for hours. They made shapes without even trying and their beauty was so modest. I knew about their heat but I couldn't feel a thing. All I could feel was the graceful breeze on my skin and the blades of grass tickling the sides my neck.

About twenty feet from my left side were the woods I mentioned previously. At night, it was so dark that you could barely see the branches I came to know so well. But, you could still indeed observe life that was buzzing quite closely by. The black of night revealed a light show put on by the fireflies. The dark, ominous trees acted as their backdrop while they flew through the air. You couldn't hear their wings, or smell the distinct dirty smell they left in your palm after you caught one, but you could see the flickering of each light as I switched back and forth from

gazing at the stars to watching my lively friends to my left. I felt an almost honor to live on a planet with such beauty. Every night I was out there I discovered one more gorgeous element around me that made me even more astonished at God's inconceivable creation. From the vast skies above me to the flickering of a truly natural energy beside me, I was in a constant state of awe.

Lying in the grass those nights didn't just open my eyes to the beauty of creation and the immense galaxy that looks down on us. Being there every night taught me much more. We live in an insane world. We tend to slow down for nothing. But being out there forced every part of me to slow. Being out there centered me. The stars reminded me that there is so much more than just me and my life and my priorities. I found myself wondering who else was gazing at the same stars I was feasting my eyes on. The thought opened my mind up to an entire other world of wonder. Some people find their center in yoga or music. Mine, I came to discover those nights, comes from being under the stars. I became an addict. I was addicted to the curiosity yet serenity it brought me. Eventually I would get tired, I would realize the need for a real bed under my body, and I would pry myself away from the familiarity of the ground on my spine and go home. Climbing into bed, without fail, I'd feel a sense of incomparable brilliance. My heavy eyes would close, but I could still see the splendor of the galaxy under my eyelids.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF WHAT I DON'T NEED

Sarah Thomason

At salary negotiation time,
The mouth smirked, and an eyebrow raised at me.
He referenced Maslow's pyramid of needs,
And pointed at the bottom, at what's mine.
My face went hot under my toothy grin.
I fought my muscles to widen my eyes.
I looked at him with innocent surprise:
"I wish I had that upper-crust learnin'."

Apparently, he'd used this line before.
The pyramid that pointed at my chin,
The real estate he covered with his grin...
I stood, I walked, but did not slam the door.

E-950

Naomi Fraher

Stephanie is an E-950: an attempted suicide. My stomach drops. She is even younger than Kenny. She stabilized early this morning. She's luckier than Kenny.

"Nurse!" I hear someone in the room yell. "She's awake."

I rush to the side of her. Blonde hair and pale skin. Her resemblance to Kenny and my mom are striking. Her eyes are fluttering.

"Hi, Stephanie, sweetie, you are in the hospital. How are you feeling?" Another nurse runs to her other side with water. Her wrists are covered. She lost a lot of blood.

"It didn't work," she says softly and slowly.

"Are you in any pain?"

"Pain? So much pain. So much..." Her neck is like putty. I won't be able to get much from her while she's in her morphine daze. I let her sleep.

I turn to the family in the room. "She is under a lot of drugs right now, so she will be in and out of sleep for the next couple of hours. She is stable and all of her levels look good. I will be right outside of this door filling out paper work, if you need me."

"I remember you. Jocelyn, right?" a woman with short dirty blonde hair, spiked unevenly, says. It's Stephanie's mother. She's hard to forget.

"Jessica," I smile.

"I didn't like that Rashida character we had last night," she says.

"Rashida is the overnight nurse. I will be with you most of today," I say, surveying the room. There is a man in the corner, Stephanie's father. His eyes are red and swollen and he's clutching a black leather book. There is an unfamiliar boy leaning in the

doorway, arms folded over his flannel, staring intently at the ground. He wasn't here last time. His jaw is clenched tightly, angry screams begging to come out. I know that look.

I am almost out of the room when I hear a shuddering sob escape her father's chest. "I'm so sorry, Stephanie. I'm so sorry. I failed you. I'm sor—" His grief drowns him speechless.

The young boy in the doorway almost knocks me over as he storms out of the room. He punches the wall closest to him. "Shit!" He shakes his hand. These walls are brutal. I nearly broke my knuckle on them before.

"Whoa." I grab his shoulder.

Tears are begging to drop at the corners of his eyes. "I need ice."

I nod and walk to the freezer by the nurses' desk. I hand it to him. He's zoned out on the floor. The tears winning their battle against his eyelids.

"She's going to be okay," I say.

"That's what they said the last time," he says.

"Well, she's alive. That's all that matters right now," I can feel the fire in my throat begin to ignite. I stand up. I'm not as willing to let my tears win.

Kenny was the one who taught me to use walls instead of people as anger outlets. I wonder who taught this boy.

I make my way down the hall, sliding doors open and close as I walk. Kenny used to swipe his hands in front of him and say he was using "The Force" whenever he saw automatic doors. I turn the corners where the white walls blur into each other.

I banter with Tricia about what her son Daniel did in school yesterday and what her daughter Lauren did in soccer. Sometimes, I think it would be nice to have kids. Bobby and I tried for a while, it wouldn't work. I look at the tan line on my fourth finger. I swore I'd never be like my parents. I pass the doughnuts Maureen brings every morning and think about taking one, but decide against it. I need to work on my diet.

I begin to make my rounds to each patient, asking how they are feeling, if they have any pain, etc. This is my normal Tuesday routine. I remember sitting shotgun in Kenny's brand new Sebring

convertible every Tuesday of high school. It was the one day a week Kenny didn't have practice. We would drive after school and blast Third Eye Blind, drinking our 7-11 Slurpees. Those were the good days. Those were Kenny's good days.

I am checking the Stephanie's IV and making sure all of her levels are correct. She is still asleep. A chunk of her elbow is darker than her skin, her own Dalmatian spot. That's what Kenny called them. I have one that stretches almost the full length of my calf. The boys down the block would make fun of me, but Kenny always defended me. "Don't worry, Katie. It's special. It's a Dalmatian spot," Kenny would say, wiping my tears.

"Pretty ugly ain't it?" I hadn't realized I was still staring at her elbow.

"Not at all. I got one on my leg just like it," I say. "Dalmatian spots," I turn and lift up my pant leg.

"I like that," She pauses. "It's not the only mark I'll have to worry about now," She looks down at her arm. I say nothing and pretend to keep busy.

"You judging me?" she asks.

I'm not sure what to respond, "No, but I am sad to see you back here."

"Me too, Jess." She turns and stares toward the flowerpot in the corner of the room. It is a white sunflower. I haven't seen one of those in years. There used to be a field of them next to my house. Kenny and I would play there for hours. We'd play "Your Highness," a game we had made up. We were the king and queen of the land. He'd place the white sunflowers all in my hair and call it my crown. My mom always got so mad because pollen would powder my light brown hair, causing me to sneeze for hours. I didn't care, playtime with Kenny was the best time.

"So apparently it is frowned upon to get some fresh air next to the oncology department," Stephanie's mother comes rushing back into the room waving her arms, ruining my daydream. It barely takes a minute for the bitter smell of smoke to fill my nostrils.

"Well maybe if you were actually getting fresh air and not

lung cancer, they wouldn't have a problem," Stephanie says back to her mom. She's quick.

"I don't need that from you right now. How are you feeling?"

"Just peachy, mom," Stephanie says.

"Good. Now it's time to get better. I hate hospitals." She kisses Stephanie on the forehead and pats her hair. I couldn't tell if her mother was just disregarding Stephanie's suicide attempt or she knew it was coming. Either way, I wasn't sure I'd like the answer.

I begin to change out the gauze on Stephanie's wrists. Her mother suddenly becomes occupied by her phone while Stephanie stares out the windows.

"Oh Louise, you smell like an ashtray." Stephanie's father is beginning to bald. His eyes are sunken. My father looked just like that many years ago; his hair grayed early, his face thinned, and his eyes fallen so deep into his face you could lose them. You can always see the true character of a man when it comes to his kid. He takes a seat next to the bed.

"We met with Dr. Koontz earlier today. It was the same old shit with him," Louise says.

"Louise, please," her father says.

"What, Henry? I don't know why you two like him. He's all too serious for me."

"Well, it is a serious matter."

I wonder how they are still married. Bobby and I couldn't make it through the easy stuff; like letting go of the past and breaking down the walls between us.

"How are you doing, sunflower?" He awkwardly pats her shoulder.

"I'm doing okay, Dad," Stephanie says.

"That's good. That's good," he says, more for himself than Stephanie. He opens his black leather book.

"Oh, what's your sermon on this week?" Stephanie looks at him with so much love in her eyes, but also so much pain.

"We're in Philippians." He begins highlighting.

"That's the happiest book of the Bible, ain't it?"

"That's what they say." He doesn't look up.

"How ironic." She barely whispers.

"We'll change them again before you go to bed tonight," I say, gathering up the bloody bandages and I leave the room.

Lunch is quick and easy. I packed myself a tuna salad with Weight Watchers sandwich rounds. I used to eat whatever I wanted. I was blessed with an athletic build and a perky butt, but I figured if I have to start dating again, I should try to diet.

I don't even know if I want to date again. I was never good at it. I always kept myself far enough out of reach. Bobby was the exception, so I married him. But I guess even he got tired of me.

I make my way back upstairs from the cafeteria and near Stephanie's room again. I see the boy in the doorway take a deep breath and make his way into Stephanie's room. I go over and pretend to check her chart.

"Hey, handsome," she says. I guess that's her boyfriend. There is no response from him. "I get you're mad at me, but—" she continues.

"No. You don't get to talk this time. I have been tossing and turning ideas around in my head all day, trying to figure out why. Why did you do this again? I thought you were getting better. We all thought you were getting better. Is it me? Why do you want to leave me here?" His voice kept getting louder and louder.

"It's not that, Colt. It's never been about you. You're the only thing that keeps me going some days. I promise it's not you. I'm just all messed up inside. It's me, it's my head, not you." Her voice is calm.

"That's just it, Steph! I love you. I love you so much. Damn, do I love you. But, I can't love you unless you love yourself. I can't do it anymore, and I probably shouldn't say this right here, right now, considering the circumstances, but you are selfish. You are so damn selfish!" He is out of breath.

"Don't leave, Colt. Please don't leave me." Her voice is panicky.

There is a long pause. "I can't stay anymore." He rushes out of the room wiping his face, which I'm sure is stained with tears.

I walk into the room slowly. "Boy troubles?"

She laughs. "You believe what he said? You think I'm selfish?" Her eyes are dry. Her body is still.

"Do you think you're selfish?"

"I asked you first," she smirks. I remember the day I found Kenny. He hadn't answered any of the family's phone calls in two days, so I stopped by his apartment one day after work. There was no note, no explanation. Just an empty, tagged, orange bottle.

"I used to be like him. Angry. All of the time. So I can't say I blame him."

"But, do you blame me?"

"I don't know you." But, I blame Kenny. So what's the difference? That she's alive? What if I had this chance with Kenny? What would I tell him?

"You do. You think I'm selfish," she pauses. "Maybe I am. I have friends. I have an incredible boyfriend who obviously cares. I have parents, who aren't the most conventional, but they're never mean and they are still together. I am 'pretty' by definition. So maybe I am selfish. But what if I can't stop being selfish?" That catches my attention and I look up. She's rubbing her wrists. "I get sad sometimes, which is selfish because I have nothing to be sad over. I am hogging sadness. But, I don't know how to not be sad. I don't know how to not be selfish." Her brow furrows. "That doesn't make sense, does it?"

This is the first time all day I see tears begin to form in her eyes. My heart hurts. I want to grab her and hug her. I also want to slap her and yell. She is so selfish, just like Kenny was. But she can't help it.

Maybe it was my fault Kenny killed himself. If I hadn't ignored the warning signs then maybe he would be here now. For Christ's sake, he tried to do it once before, when he was in college. Shouldn't that have been enough for me to step up and help him? He was always helping me, saving me from terrible ex-boyfriends, taking the heat from our parents about the party we threw when they were gone, and making sure I was always protected. But the one time Kenny needed me to protect him, I failed.

I begin to hyperventilate. I can't be here right now. I need to go. I have to get out of here. I run out of the room and to the bathroom. The fire is burning my throat. My chest feels like a thousand choked down cries are about to bust open my chest. I hold onto the sink.

Keep it together, Jess. Keep it together. You can do it. You've done it for nearly a year now. Keep it together.

The hot tears beg to rush down my cheeks, but I keep fighting. My knees buckle. I feel like I'm going to be sick. My throat is searing.

I hate him. He haunts my thoughts. I hate him. I'm so mad at him. I hate him. He was so selfish. I hate him. He knew I would find him. I hate him. How could he? I hate him.

I breathe. I suck back the tears. I breathe. I pick myself off the floor. I splash the cool water on my face. It feels so good. I breathe. I have to get back to work although everything in me wants to crumble again. I breathe. I swallow some of that cold water, sizzling out the fire. I breathe. I will not let my tears get the best of me.

The end of my day nears quickly. I don't go back to Stephanie's room for a while. I don't know if I can handle it. But, I have to check up one last time before my shift is over. Half of it is out of obligatory work duties, the other half is because I feel like I owe her something.

I enter the room. None of her family is there. "Stephanie, I'm just going to do some last minute checkups before I leave."

"Oh, you're leaving?"

"Yeah. My shift ends at three." I shrug and jot down her levels.

"I see the crazy doctor tomorrow," she says.

"Don't call him that. You know he's not that bad," I say although I've never met Dr. Koontz.

"Let's just say his unibrow is the most interesting thing about him." She smiles at me. I smile back. "Has anyone close to you ever died, Jess?"

"Yeah." I pause. "My brother."

"Did he kill himself?" I look at the floor, trying not to cry again. "I thought so," she says. "I can tell by the way you look at me. It was different than last time." I pretend to fiddle with her wires.

"I hope you know, it wasn't because he didn't love you," she continues.

"Thanks." The old flame doesn't light this time, but I still can't

look her in the eyes.

"Also, on the down-low, you're my favorite nurse. That Rashida bitch is kinda crazy."

I try to control my giggle. "Well, thank you." I lean closer to her, "You're one of my favorite patients."

"Who? Me? Now, you're just saying that." We both laugh together. I'm glad Stephanie hasn't lost her spunk yet.

"Hey, Jess, before you leave, can you take that plant over there?"

"But it's yours." I see the tall sunflower blooming in the corner of the room. It's so beautiful.

"I'm tired of sunflowers. I think you need one," she says.

"Sure," I take the pot in the corner. It smells divine. "I hope to never see you again," I say, before exiting the room.

"Now why you gotta be like that?" she laughs.

I laugh. "Bye Stephanie."

"Bye Jess. Take good care of that flower."

My feet crunch over the reddening leaves. I am clutching the flowerpot tight to my body. It has grown a couple of inches. Everything in me wants to go back to the car, but I will my legs to move forward. I need to do this.

I cross the street and walk up the side of the Beebe Lake Bridge. Fall is always Ithaca's most beautiful time of the year. Kenny and I would come here a lot. We would throw rocks into the water, talk about life, or not talk at all. When I think back on it, he was truly my best friend.

"Hey Ken, it's been a while, hasn't it?" I don't know why I'm talking out loud. Maybe I'm hoping he can hear me.

"I brought you something." I place the pot with the white sunflower on the concrete ledge. "Sometimes I wish you had died here. It would be so much more poetic than pills," I laugh to myself. I probably look absurd.

I am quiet for a while.

"I miss you. So much." I muster up the last of my strength. "But, I'm not mad anymore."

I let the tears win.

A FAMILIAR HIKE

Danielle Price

Ice stood still across the peaks,
Wind chilled, land frozen.
We have been here before

When fog rolled through the sky
And the view wasn't quite so clear.
But we had seen it all before.

Five thousand, nine hundred and forty six feet.
Uphill, don't look back, but think about it.
It's a different hike alone.

An empty hand and weighted heart
Climb the same cleared path
As all those years before.

Now the cold has taken your place
On our mountain.
I've never been here at all.

LET IT SNOW

Todd Jackson

The distant theatre marquee cast a dim light through falling snow toward the street corner where a black oak stood. I could feel the burden of its branches as I rested on the bench beneath them, an icy wet patch spreading down my legs. I had tried to wipe the snow away before sitting, but ice had formed beneath the fluff and my best efforts accomplished little. I didn't care; the girl from the hotel was right.

She was talking incessantly to a man too old for her while the desk lady took her time finding my keys. It was late and just a few days till Christmas. I made the trip home to see the family but the lovers in the lobby were the only lively souls I'd come across for hours since driving into my old hometown. And I was quickly wishing they would get on with it back to their room—hopefully well away from my own. I was about to make that suggestion to them when the girl arched back dramatically and sighed.

"I just can't believe that cute little theater's closing! Hasn't it been there since, like, forever? I mean, why would they? We had such a nice night there. It's not like we need any more dumb apartments anyway."

The man with her began futilely explaining something about economics and local politics, but I too had tuned him out. Surely she must be mistaken. I turned as though to ask her if she was certain but the series of questions and accusations caught in my throat. The town theatre was a virtual landmark for God's sake. The city would never agree to it. Surely.

I heard a clatter behind me as the long-awaited room keys were placed on the counter. The desk lady was just doing her job, but I nearly vented my whole, long day on her right then.

Well, what do you know! So half an hour after you take my bags up to my room, someone found a key to let me inside too? That's great, wonderful in fact. Tell me, am I special, or do you treat all your guests so well in this backward piece of... After glaring down at the front desk for a second or two, I swiped the keys into my pocket, re-buttoned my jacket, and spun around to leave without thanks or care to the thoughts of those I left behind me.

The deepening snow slowed me down, but after fifteen minutes of walking, I neared the block of the only theatre in town. There I saw it for myself—the sign across the theatre door declaring its last showing New Year's Day. I spent the next few minutes emptily staring at the outdated architecture and reading over the soon-to-be apartment's amenities with unforgiving criticism. Eventually, I wandered on to an old bench beneath a tree on the opposite street corner. If the snow buried me where I sat, I don't know that I would have bothered.

Short misty breaths dissipated into the night as I stared out at the place that was still so familiar after all these years. The theatre stood on the opposite side of Main St. at the end of a long, unbroken stretch of eclectic storefronts. First St. crossed by the theatre and at one time continued on past where I sat into a long downhill stretch with a wide median planted with oaks like this one. But now that two-lane strip was mostly clay and slush, an open space enclosed by silt fencing and construction signs. The flurry broke and revealed yet more barren ground as the tree next to me, bent over and alone, dripped puffs of snow as though it wept. Everything I could see was frozen and still, as if time too had slowed for a moment to observe the loss while the world drifted toward absolute zero.

Shivering hard, I realized my teeth were chattering and my legs were growing numb. I stood and breathed into my gloved hands, flexing my arms and legs to get the blood flowing again. The mystic lulling of the place gave way to the tingling in my extremities and for a while I forgot I was back. The only thing on my mind was how I hadn't brought my heavy coat. But eventually I spun to face the bench again and my view fixed on the undisturbed

snow next to where I'd been. ...I'd never intended to come back here again, and now I wished I hadn't.

A few weeks and almost a decade ago, I sat right here with a girl named Rose. It was the night of our first high school dance and we were waiting for our friends, late as usual, to arrive for our dinner reservations. Neither of us were dressed to spend much time outside in November but I offered her my jacket while we sat. I could take the cold for a little while. For her sake, I wanted to.

I'd liked her for a while now but hadn't found the nerve to tell her. I wanted to reach an arm around her and pull her close—to keep her warm, of course. But was that too much? Too soon? In my brief hesitation, she leaned into me, wrapped in my coat, and my arm draped itself gently behind her on the bench. Acorns crunched beneath my shoe on the loose brick sidewalk as I adjusted my leg and smiled at our combined shadow. I turned to her and found she had bundled herself tightly to her nose. Her eyes met mine and she froze with a girlish look. My curious smile must have grown as her face appeared again, laughing loud and free the way she always did. Our friends did eventually show, but I don't recall either of us complaining to them about the cold.

As Valentine's approached, Rose agreed to join me for another dance. Her golden curls of shoulder-length hair were the talk of the night and she spent more of the evening dancing barefoot than in the heels she'd been so excited to wear. The winter was bad that year too and I double-checked that I'd packed a blanket in my truck. I was happy to fight the chill while the engine warmed as she wrapped every inch of herself that worn-out cloth would cover on the way back to her parents. I shivered a little as I fumbled my way through what I'd committed to tell her.

Rose smiled but didn't look over as she lowered the blanket to her lap. "I thought you might bring this up."

I glanced over and caught her eyes for a moment, sharing my own nervous, tight-lipped smile before facing back toward the road. She was unsure. I'd be headed off to college at the end of

the semester and neither of us had been in a relationship before. We parked outside her door and she turned in her seat to speak with me eye-to-eye.

"I have to pray about this. And I want to talk to my parents. But I've enjoyed spending time with you and I wouldn't say that if I wasn't willing to give it a chance. Us a chance."

Rose was leaning forward, all fearless smile and eyes like blue-green flames flaring into mine. She looked beautiful in her grandmother's dress and pearl earrings. Only the center console separated our bodies. But I stopped. I didn't know what to do; what not to do, only that I did not want to cross the wrong line with her. I looked into her eyes and then down at the space between us, still smiling.

"I'm happy with that." I said, glancing back at you once more before sliding out to open your door.

But I wasn't ready. Rose never told me if she'd talked with her parents or what they said, but she agreed to join me once more when I asked her to a movie the following Saturday. What exactly I expected to change, I couldn't say. But aside from a passing smile and knowing glance, everything seemed the same during the week. Just a wink or a note or letting me catch her staring would have raised mountains under my confidence. But she gave me nothing.

Twice she had to change our plans for that day: first to cut the dinner because she had to be home, second to move the movie to lunchtime because she had to be home even sooner. And while in the theatre, watching a movie she'd already seen with a friend the week before, she hardly moved when I touched her shoulder. I knew then she'd made her decision. The hand I held out of hope as we exited the theatre was limp and without heat, like that of one already dead. No eye-contact was made on the silent walk back till she thanked me for unlocking her door as she climbed in the truck. I nodded as I walked back around to my side, looking up the hill to see our empty bench.

I would regret not kissing Rose that night in the truck. Would it have made a difference? If only I had gone inside and told her parents how I felt. If only I had proven how serious I was. If only

I had done so much. I tried, but I was scared. I was still mustering the confidence to touch her and speak to her differently. But she had already moved on.

Years passed and we remained close, or at least we tried. I did what I could to put the hurt behind me, but when she'd trust me with a secret or when I found that some guy she liked mistreated her, somehow our past would get brought up again. It never went well. Sometimes she would tell me there were just some places and pieces of her she could never share with me and that she'd messed up in her naivety by giving me too much to start. She was right, and in later years I would come to understand her position more. But she would never tell me why, and somehow even then I knew I'd never get an answer.

The tension between us grew as we entered college. How fitting that we would end up at the same school once again. We hardly did anything together anymore besides talk. Near the end, she finally told me that she had no idea I even felt anything for her when I spoke up that night in the truck. I told her I had a hard time believing that, all things considered. And I could recall the night pretty well.

"It doesn't matter," Rose insisted. "You need to understand that I don't have any feelings for you whatsoever and that I never did."

And that was that. While I had a hard time forgetting, she couldn't even remember.

I sighed deeply, ignoring the cold burn of the air in my lungs. Memories continued flashing of this place and of that first failed love. I recalled my most extreme moments of folly, like how I had it briefly in my head that I might propose to Rose here. I could see her eyes, still like fire, welling with tears of joy. And for once, they were looking at me. It was too much. My eyes widened as I came back to myself and in a fury I kicked at the place I'd been sitting, sending the bench skidding backwards till it almost slapped the oak. For a minute I just stood there breathing heavily in silence.

... What was I doing? I was a grown man with a job and his whole life ahead of him. How stupid did I have to be to get so

upset over a short-lived high school fling? Last I heard, Rose was off living her dream; travelling the world, fighting sex-trafficking, and so on. It'd been a long time since we last spoke, but part of me hoped she was well. Things changed for me too, even a few short-lived relationships had come and gone. But this place still got to me.

Everything changed here. Rose was the first to make me ask what I was willing to be for someone else. She would never know how long it took me to forgive the heartbreaker who wasn't sorry; how hard it was to accept the apology I never received. I wondered if she ever realized it; if someone ever made her feel that way too. I wondered if all sorts of people had felt like I did and whether they too had just tried to forget it, fully knowing love couldn't be that easy. Or maybe I was just an outlier; a coward and a fool finally tired of hiding after all this time.

The snow was beginning again and my tired limbs protested any further loitering. I looked back down the hill at the construction. The winter might be slowing things down, but it looked like soon the place where I was standing, along with the bench and this tree, would be smoothed over to build something new. Nodding to myself, I adjusted my coat and shoved my gloved hands into its pockets, bracing against the cold walk home. I paused after a few steps and looked back at the tree and at the empty bench. With unexpected contentment, I felt I'd stayed here long enough.

I didn't turn back to tell at what point that corner of my life was consumed by the curtain of white behind me.

LOST

Sarah Carlton

Veins pump a demented beat
Sparks fly from moving feet

Time takes on its thrashing wings
Singers whine about daily things

Heads ooze and become mindless
The night slowly becomes timeless

Smoke swirls through my lungs
Through the haze, we are one

Hearts wander into cardiac arrest
Hips move without protest

Matted hair binds to sweaty necks
Strangers lips start to connect

Music bangs in a violence
Feel the love; feel the kindness

Forever it is always dark
Keep me here
Keep me lost

GRAFTON STREET

Ciara McTarsney

The grass of the field that we found
on the side of the road was littered
with patches of sheep that looked

like fallen clouds. We chased the stupid
beasts like rabid herding dogs, until we
stumbled upon the bones of a dead one

sunken into the rich dirt, wild daffodils growing
through its empty sockets. I tried to pretend
we'd found the remains of a dinosaur

while we later walked through the streets
of Dublin. The brick road was slick
under the rubber bottoms of my converse

as I inhaled the endless clouds
of cigarette smoke, unable to shake
those yellow floral pupils staring up at me.

SIMPLE ADDITION

Naomi Fraher

I.

You are constantly
Searching for someone
To make up
The other half of you,
To stitch the cuts
And mend the bruises.
Someone to take
The unraveling thread
And sew it back
To themselves.
But that only
Causes them to
Unwind your pattern.

II.

No one can fix
Or polish your
Rougher bits
Without erasing
Parts of you.
No one completes
You because you
Are already whole.
All one should ever do
Is add to you.

III.

Allow me to add to you,
Because you've already multiplied me.

NOVEMBER 29, 2014 (TO MARK STRAND AND THE POETS OF ENGLISH 344)

Greg Dunn

November 29, 2014
(To Mark Strand and the Poets
of English 344)

We ate him as he died
and wondered

at the lesson
of black stars
illuminating nothing.

Air moved in to fill
the space,
field no longer absent;

the man in the mirror
kept things whole
simply by his moving.

THE HITMAN

Corrine Watson

Dorian Blake had a simple job. It wasn't hard to kill a man. Life was quite fragile after all. All it took was a precise shot, a swift flick of a blade, or the proper amount of pressure on the right spot of the human anatomy for life to slip away.

He was never sure how people went about searching for someone with his specific services, but when the office called, he answered. They sent him the details of the client, as well as where they should meet. Dorian enjoyed places that were simple and public; somewhere his alternative twenty-seven year old style wouldn't stand out. For this particular case, he found himself at the downtown coffee shop. The heat from his Earl Grey tea warmed his fingers as he waited outside on this chilly winter night. Sighing, he checked his watch. Personally, he believed that tardiness should result in the immediate termination of their contract. But clients tended to be so terribly hesitant and indecisive in these situations. As a compromise, Dorian decided to add a hundred dollars to the bill for each minute that the client was late.

This was the price he paid for not working with upscale clients who were always punctual. Although they paid more, they acted in a condescending manner that made Dorian reconsider his target. They also required a specific decorum, and he felt too conspicuous in a suit.

After about five minutes, he spotted a gangly middle aged man poking his head out of the alley. His tea was gone, and the man showed no signs of approaching him anytime soon. The clients were never considerate of his time, and he wasn't in the mood to wait any longer. With sure aim, he tossed his empty cup in the trash. Reaching into his jacket pocket, he grabbed his gray

beanie and pulled it over his frozen ears. He paused at the end of the street to clean his black rimmed glasses. As he returned them to his face, he looked directly at the coward who immediately ducked back into the shadows. Casually, he stuck his gloved hands into his pockets and walked away.

Dorian smiled to himself as he whispered, "Three, two, one."

"Wait," called a shaky voice.

Confidently, Dorian slowed his pace and leaned against the wall. Either from asthma or general lack of athleticism, the man approached him wheezing rapidly. Dorian stood patiently as the man bent over to catch his breath.

"D-do you mind if I smoke?" stuttered the client, as he removed his wire rimmed glasses.

"Yes, I do mind," said Dorian calmly.

Flustered, the man put his glasses back on and pulled a folded envelope out from his pocket. "Here are the instructions," he said handing the envelope to Dorian.

He pulled out the handwritten instructions, as well as a photograph of the target, as the client continued to speak. "He's a coworker of mine, Arthur White. He lives in an apartment alone, so it shouldn't be too much trouble." He paused looking around nervously. "I would never do this if it wasn't for the fact that he intends to expose me for my—indiscretions," he said shifting his gaze to his feet.

With men like this, indiscretions generally meant drugs or an affair. But it wasn't Dorian's place to pry. He could still remember the days when he listened to his conscience, but in this profession he soon learned that a conscience doesn't pay the bills.

The man in the picture was in his early to mid-thirties and stood smiling in his suit. The photo was cut from a company catalogue; this was probably the man's first serious job. It was unfortunate that the information he came across would cost him so much. Having memorized the information, Dorian returned it to the envelope. He pulled a syringe containing clear liquid from the bottom and tucked it discreetly into his pocket.

"This says that you want the job done tonight," said Dorian as he handed the instructions back to the client.

"Y-yes, that's right. He said I had the evening to come clean or he would have to do it for me."

"The short notice will cost extra," he said tersely.

"Does that mean you accept the job?"

"Yes. Did my employer give you the instructions for the money transfer?"

"Yes, I have it right here," he said pulling out his phone. "All I have to do is press send."

Dorian stood up straight and looked at the phone. "Add a thousand for the short notice, and five hundred for being late."

As if he thought that the price of a man's life would be cheap, the client's eyes grew wide. He stood frozen for a moment to contemplate the severity of his current predicament. In the end, he decided that this was his best option and added in the new price to end Arthur White's life. Reluctantly, he pressed send.

Dorian pulled out his own phone to await his boss's approval while the client fidgeted uncomfortably next to him.

"So how does one become a hi—"

Before he could finish Dorian interrupted. "One with my particular skill sets learns not to discuss them so openly." Just then his phone began to vibrate, confirming the payment. Dorian bid the client a goodnight and assured him that the deed would be carried out in the next few hours.

Dorian reached the apartment of Arthur White a quarter after midnight. He nonchalantly circled the block a few times, until the light in apartment 394 went out. In a fair chance of luck, a drunken couple approached the front door. While they fumbled with their keys, Dorian jogged across the street. In a gentlemanly fashion, Dorian held the door for the two boozers and smiled as he followed them inside. While they took the elevator, he took the stairs. Once on the third floor, he pulled out his lock pick and approached the door labeled 394. With a well-practiced hand, he quickly picked the lock. Soundlessly, he slipped into the room. A light shone through the hall way, casting shadows through the small apartment.

As Dorian carefully stepped around furniture and piles of

paperwork, a flush echoed from the next room. He pinned himself against the wall, away from the light. In the bathroom mirror, Dorian could see Arthur White brushing his teeth. He wore a plain t-shirt and boxers, and seemed perfectly unaware that his life was about to end. After Arthur spit and rinsed out his tooth brush, Dorian grabbed the syringe from his pocket containing four cc of penicillin. According to the client's instructions, Arthur White was deathly allergic.

Arthur yawned and scratched his head as he stepped into the hall. Unfortunately, that would be the last thing he would do. No more late nights, minty toothpaste, or comfortable beds. Mr. White's life had come to an end, and Dorian had been paid to take it.

Once Arthur was completely exposed, Dorian emerged from the shadows and grabbed him around the neck. The man struggled in Dorian's grasp, as they banged against the walls of the narrow hallway. He could feel Arthur trying to call out, but he could only muster a few strained gasps. Dorian felt the man go limp in his arms, and allowed him to slump to his knees. With his free hand, Dorian injected the penicillin into the man's neck.

After a minute, Dorian released his grip and let Arthur slump to the floor. Arthur squirmed about for a bit, clutching his throat. Holding on to his will to live, Arthur attempted to crawl to his bedroom, but Dorian effortlessly knocked him back to the ground with his foot. It took several minutes for the man to asphyxiate, but in the end he laid wide eyed on the ground staring off into the distance like so many before him.

He took a moment to inform his boss that his work was complete and to send the cleaning crew to take care of Mr. White. As he turned to leave, he felt something brush against his leg. Quickly, he looked down to see a slender black cat rubbing against the dead man's foot. With a sigh, Dorian bent down and rubbed the cats head. Pets weren't part of the deal. The cleaning crew and the cops would leave him be, and the landlord would likely shoo him out on the streets.

The black cat stared at him with emerald green eyes. This creature didn't deserve to suffer on the behalf of his scrawny

client's foolish mistake. If he thought enough about it, neither did Arthur. Dorian looked at the immobile Mr. White apologetically. "Not that you have much of an opinion on the matter, but I'll be taking your cat," he told the dead man.

Carefully he picked up the black cat and walked out the door. Once on the street he tucked the cat into his jacket to block it from the cold. "I don't think that he'll miss you very much anyway," said Dorian with a smirk as he walked his new friend home.

FIRST POMEGRANATE

Sarah Thomason

She second-guessed the impulse when she saw it;
Another thing to carry on the bus.
The day was rain, the wetness filled her shoes,
A cold soak she would carry home to greet them.
Because of, or in spite of that, she picked one.
She did not take the smallest one there was.

She cradled like a baby what she'd gotten,
A taste of something special for her daughters.
She told the girls, "Your grandfather would never
Believe in buying 'ornamental foods.'
Before he left us, we lived in a mill town."
She stared at middle distance while she said it.

She'd almost dropped it walking from the bus stop.
A rented room, two daughters and herself,
Three buses and a train to get to market.
This city had no mills. A borrowed knife
Sliced through the flesh she'd tasted as a child;
The youngest watched her close, as if for science.

How funny, little things that she remembered.
Her mom had pulled it out of crumpled paper,
But stores today put everything in plastic.
Most of her childhood had smelled like cabbage.
At some point, she should try to make a scrapbook.
She'd find a place that threw out pretty paper.

The sweetest bits were glued about the seeds.
A borrowed spoon. Her shoes dried on the vent.

A borrowed thought: the shame of *ornamental*.
The youngest spat a seed out. "Pogranamite?"
"Pomegranate." They should eat more fruits.
They worked and ate around the seeds together.

It didn't taste familiar, like she hoped for –
She hadn't realized taste could be forgotten.
The girls were busy, almost halfway through it.
"Let's save some for tomorrow." And she took it.
She'd take the girls, the fruit, to someplace sunny.
Her girls would taste a pomegranate twice.

BABEL

Wesley Jenkins

I wonder about
It in my daydreams
Reaching up in defiance,
Bringing together people in you.
Intimate in your promises to tell
To the huddled united masses in a
Routine defiance of a Heaven who
Underlines all their fear from upon
Distant stars. They desperately want
Happiness in God's seeming absence
Without otherwise recognizing: Long does
He walk among them watching from in their
City, where he deigns to work in mystic ways.

THE ALBUM

Megan Rosenthal

I remember the wild beating of my heart and the stupid flip my stomach did when I saw the perfectly curled pink ribbon and the tag of the package addressed to "my love" sitting on the step to my apartment. Eli had called me a few days before it arrived to say he was sending a present in the mail.

"Why couldn't you just bring it to me?" I had asked, wanting to see him in person one last time before he returned home after graduation.

"I would hate to ruin the last time I saw you if you didn't like what I got you," he had tried to reason with me over the phone as he was heading to the airport.

"It's from you. How could I possibly not like it?"

"I love you," he said, evading my question.

"I'm going to miss you," I replied instead. "Fly safe and keep in touch."

Now sixth months later, I sit on the edge of the same bed I had sat on when I first opened the package, holding the same box the gift had originally been sent in. Even though the cardboard has been worn around the corners of the box, I run my fingers up one of the edges and reach inside to pull out its contents.

Inside is a photo album. The album is small; at the time he had given it to me, it held one picture for every month we had been together for a total of seven photographs. Gingerly, I stroke the old cover where the leather had faded around the edges from continuous handling. The dark brown of the casing is offset by a small scripture etched in a gold ink: "To Anna... thank you."

I had called him when I first read that. "What are you thanking me for?"

"Everything."

Slowly, I lift the cover and open the album. The leather on the spine of the album emits a succession of cracks as the pages are gently pulled apart from one another. I settle the front of the cover against the denim of my jeans, and am startled, just as I am every time I open the album, at the blueness of my eyes staring back at me. "November 16th" is etched in the same gold ink at the top of the page.

I smile at the memory of the photograph. The air had just begun to cool off as the impending threat of winter was prefaced by the arrival of autumn breeze. Red and orange leaves cascaded from the spindly arms of the tree branches above as we walked the campus path from the dorms to class.

"Look at those promiscuous trees, stripping before our innocent eyes," Eli had chastised, threading his fingers through mine.

"Big words confuse us non-English majors," I replied, letting my arm swing in time with his.

"The trees are sluts."

"That makes more sense." I glanced over at him to meet his gaze and saw a spark of an idea spinning behind them.

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

No sooner than I voiced the question, Eli had abandoned my grip and dashed over to a nearby pile of leaves that had been raked to perfection. That image was shattered as he scooped up an armful and threw them into the air, letting the leaves rain down on him, adorning his clothes with the little brown ornaments.

"What are you, twelve?" I laughed at his immaturity.

"Absolutely. Your turn." In no time, he had the leaves whirling around me as well until I gave in and was throwing them around on my own.

"Wait!" he cried. "Don't move."

I froze, my face half obscured by the handful of brown, crunchy leaves clasped in my hand, poised and ready to be launched in the air. With my eyes just poking out from behind the curtain they created, and my long hair escaping confinement from the tie at the nape of my neck, Eli pulled out his phone from his back pocket and took the photograph.

I turn the page. "December 5th" glides across the top of the next page, crowning a picture that had been taken at the mall. It was one of those cheesy pictures that kids got when they went to tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas. We were basically just window shopping and eating funnel cake when we passed through the center of the complex and saw the giant blow up snow globe display. The jolly man himself sat on a golden throne before it, draped in a velvet red suit that was stretched taut around his middle and cinched with a black belt, the plastic buckle pressed firmly into his stomach. Eli saw the spectacle first.

"We need to get a picture."

"Why?"

"Sentimental value. You never know when you would want to look back on this moment in time and remember aimlessly walking for hours, feet on fire from the pain of the miles covered, surrounded by hundreds of strangers, all desperately scavenging for cheap presents that try to convince their loved ones they really do love them."

I snorted. "Why would I want to remember that?"

He shrugged. "I know I would."

"Why is that?"

"Because I did it with you."

So we took a picture with Santa Claus, each of us awkwardly perched on one of his knees, hands resting conservatively in our laps, smiles on our faces that each resembled more of a grimace.

January 26th. It was a normal day. We were at the coffee shop on campus. I had ordered a dirty chai tea latte. Eli had a hot chocolate. We got our drinks and sat down at the table in the back right corner, right next to the fireplace that was alight with a projected image of flames dancing on the screen, creating the illusion of warmth.

He took a sip from his drink, his name scrawled across the cup in loose feminine writing.

"I think she dotted your 'I' with a heart," I told him.

He glanced at his name. "She did. Jealous?"

"Definitely." His charming personality was usually mistaken for being a casual flirt. Often, it was difficult to tell a difference.

He grinned, pulled out his phone, and held it up in front of him.

"What are you doing?" I asked, a little sour.

"Taking your picture."

"Why?"

"Because you're beautiful. Smile."

Slowly, I relented and let a small smile slide. I struggled to ignore the warm feeling spreading through my stomach. I blamed the fake fire glowing next to me.

February 14th. Valentine's Day formal. The volunteer photographer had positioned us in the center of the archway that marked the entrance. Red and pink balloons adorned the crest the enveloped us.

"Should I do the possessive hand pose?" I grinned up at Eli.

"Of course," he said, adjusting the red tie underneath his dark suit. "I'm yours."

I placed my hand against his torso and his wrapped around my waist, fingers buried in the red fabric of my dress.

"Ready?" the photographer asked. "One, two, three, cheese."

I looked at him to find him already smiling at me when the camera's flash went off.

March 30th. We were in my room, lying on my bed. His head rested against the headboard while mine laid against his chest. His arms were curled around me and holding a book out in front of him. Because he often bragged about his superior reading pace, his eyes had adjusted to match my slower speed so we were able to turn the pages in steady rhythm, both of us invested in the tale. About halfway through, I apparently had fallen asleep, for I didn't remember the ending of the story. I also didn't remember the picture in the album being taken. My head was against his heart, my eyes gently shut against the rest of the world. The book had been abandoned as one of his arms held me close and the other had snapped the picture.

April 15th. My pick for an adventure. Hiking. Flowers had begun erupting from the tyrannous soil that had kept them trapped all winter. The trails were green. The birds were singing, providing an elegant backdrop as we marched up the mountain.

"Are we there yet?" Eli asked.

"A little further."

And at once, the dome of the trees opened their arms, branches fanning out around us, clearing an opening into the bright light of afternoon sun. We ducked under the natural pergola and stopped, both awestruck at the view before us.

"Wow," he whispered. The expanse of the mountainous horizon stretched seemingly into forever before us. Sunlight danced along the ridge of the hills, teasing soft watercolors of spring in the sky.

"Breathtaking, right?" I grinned.

He turned to me. "Absolutely."

I reached over and slid my hand into the pocket of his cargo pants. Wordlessly, I took his phone out and focused on the landscape, committing the image to the camera roll.

May 20th. Graduation. Four long years of college, gone in what seemed a blink of an eye. Cap and gown, both blazing blue in the afternoon sunlight. Diploma in hand with a promise of a fu-ture.

"I love you," he whispered in my ear, handing me a bouquet of pink tulips.

"Do you really have to go home for the summer?"

"Yeah, I do. But I'll be back soon. Grad school awaits us," he beamed. Both of us were enrolled to start the following fall term.

"The journey never ends, does it?" I sighed.

"Never."

I close the album, as well as my eyes, and breathe deeply, recalling the soft petals of the flowers that day and the sweet scent that accompanied them. Overcome by that nostalgia, I gently place the album on the bed and stand. Determined, I grab my keys and leave the apartment, heading down the block to the Harris Teeter on the corner.

It's November again. The cold is just starting to seep into the air, with fingers that grasp and tug my sweater away from my body. I wrap my arms around myself and quicken my pace.

It's November again. I am reminded of that as leaves crunch along the pavement as I walk.

It's November again. By some unnatural grace of fates, Harris Teeter has tulips in the produce section. The pink isn't as bright as it is in May. Regardless, I find the cluster with the fewest brown spots on the leaves and pay for it at the register. Flowers in hand, I quickly exit the store and go to see Eli.

I walk for a long time. The wind is biting today, but I don't care. I cross the intersection after the light flashes on the pedestrian crosswalk. I pass the church, the one you hit before you reach campus. I keep walking by the front entrance, and let myself in through the back wrought iron gate.

More leaves crunch under my boots as they click along the cement path. Grey. Everything is gray. The ashen sidewalk is lined by endless rows of grim stones. I keep my dull face trained ahead until I find the one I'm looking for.

It's at the end of the row on my right. It's one of the newest looking ones; the gray gleams more silver in the fading afternoon light. I kneel before it.

Eli Watson. September 2, 1994 – May 25, 2015.

Do you really have to go home?

Yes.

Have a safe flight.

I promise.

He had promised, but promises can't save things out of our control. The plane had crashed in an electrical explosion. It is now six months later, and still no one knows why. I place the flowers on the edge of the grave.

I love you.

I'm going to miss you.

A tear rolls down my cheek and splashes onto the gray tombstone, just as it always does when I come to see him. "I love you, too," I whisper, six months too late.

SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT

Sarah Thomason

Never have I been more excited—never have I been more proud—than when Professor Merrill announced to our Master Composition class that I, Suleiman Surkati, had won full scholarship for a semester abroad in America!

And yet, never have I been more nervous than when this airplane took off. I have never flown before. There was nowhere else to go, before. A shivery sadness took me when I saw my city become so tiny underneath me. I remain grateful for all of this, but I wish I had not taken a window seat.

This must end my first journal entry. Let us hope the adventure of Suleiman causes lesser ache than that of his writing hand.

In a taxi now. The driver stopped his friendly talking when he heard me speak the address of the school. I think my English must be better on paper. I am glad the Americans I will meet will be reading, more than listening, to me.

At home, they say my English is perfect.

This is not home. This is New York.

Finally, I have arrived. When the cab stopped, I removed my suitcases and paid the driver, and went to an office to find my lodging assignment. The large building with the offices is all glass in the front; it comes out to a point, meeting you on the sidewalk, but whether to offer welcome or chase you off, I cannot say.

I walked the halls for a long while before I found the office for registration. It was really a little window, like a take-away station inside a building. The girl at the window had a stripe of green hair. She did not look at me, but told me to stand in front of the screen for my picture. I said, "No, thank you, I do not take

photographs." She said they needed to take my picture for my identification card. She looked at me with bored anger; she called it "ID." I stood for the picture.

In English, even simple words are made shorter. All things seem clipped.

But, when I was roaming the building, I found the university shop. It has everything! Hair shampoo, chocolates, clothing. I must remember to get gifts for my mother and father, and the children, and Professor Merrill at home. I must bring pictures of this place back to Nanomi. My flashy cousin, with his tales about America; I think even he will not believe all of the things you can buy in one shop here.

I was put in a suite with three other people. They all have wide, white teeth that fill their mouths. One is from New York, but he calls it "the City," and one is from California, and one is from Florida. We are in the state of New York, but the man from the City tells me this is not the same.

Here at the school, it does not feel like a city. On the campus, there are beautiful fields and gardens and forests, and a small creek, but it looks like it was put here. The edges of it have no sand. I do not think it will have fish.

No sand, no fish; sharp, bright buildings. The people back home told me this land was made of pavement and glass, but I did not know they meant the land itself. There is no dirt for your feet to sink into. They fight dirt everywhere. I think these people fear dirt. (The dirt here is so dark and wet and thick that the wind cannot carry it, so perhaps they are not used to it. At home, there is no escape from dirt, so we live with it, and it is comfortable.)

It has been a long day of travel. I began this writing after my return from dinner. I had asked my suitemates to join me in my meal, but they all said no. I went to the dining hall by myself. I recognized pizza, and ate two slices. I could not figure out the soft drink dispenser. It had a screen like a television. I do not like cold tea, but I could use the nozzle, so this is what I drank. Tomorrow, I will sit behind the drink station. I will watch how the others make it work.

I went to my first writing class in Saratoga, New York today. The teacher is well respected, and he instructs us to "write what we know." What do I know? The other students ask questions as if to compete—they ask questions that are not truly questions. They want everyone to know that they have read, but it does not seem to matter, yet, if they can write.

They seem to know everything—every book that has been written, every writer there has been. I have taken so many notes in one day that I think my hand will fall off: Nabokov, Lahiri, Rushdie, Kundera, Proust, Murakami. I know few of the names they mention. We study Islamic writers at Omdurman. I have practiced English for years, but I feel like I have never read a book. Many of my books in English were comic books. The pictures helped me learn, but I think now that is not what we should be reading.

I tried what Nanomi said—to talk about the television shows. He said that Americans love watching television, and I have been watching their shows for months so I might make friends. I asked my suitemates today if they enjoy "The Big Bang Theory." They looked at me as though I smelled of dung. I do not think I will talk about television again. (Though this, too, they shorten: "TV." I wonder if they call their companions by initials. So much space, and everything compressed.)

I am supposed to write what I know, and it appears I know nothing.

I stayed in the bathroom for a long while after class. I practiced smiling with my mouth closed. Everyone in my class has a mouth full of fake-looking teeth, white, like they have never eaten saffron.

Tonight, the pizza had pork on it, round red pepperoni that I cannot eat. I found that there is a vegetarian stand that served a kind of pudding rice with mushrooms, called "risotto." I miss the food at home. They do not spice the food like in Sudan. I did not think I would miss home so much.

I asked again for my roommates to join me for dinner. They looked nervous, and all listed other places they had plans to eat.

I saw them sitting together at the dining hall. I did not walk up to their table.

I sat behind the soda machine. (They call all soft drinks "soda.") All you have to do is touch the television screen! Then, it is easy—it has the labels just like in a shop. I forgot to put the cup in place the first time, and spilled some of the soda on the floor. Tonight my root beer was very good, but the risotto was brown mush. For people who fear dirt, much of what they eat is like mud.

There was a table of girls behind me. They talked about boys they think are cute. I do not think they are writers. They were dressed like they might be ballet dancers, and they had sweaters on that were far too large. They each tried to be louder than the last, squeaking and squealing and laughing. They looked like little birds caught in blankets.

Another table near me was definitely writers. They all wore glasses that are for reading, though they were walking around, and scarves, even though it is not cold. They talked about writing, using authors' names. "Her style is very Vonnegutian." "He seems heavily influenced by Salinger." Perhaps tomorrow, I will find someone who has read Umm Zakiyyah... but even so, can I speak my thoughts in English, that they might truly hear me? I would love to talk about writing with someone, but I do not know these authors.

What do I know? I know how the soda machine works.

A terrible dream woke me tonight. I dreamed that I was at the dining hall, looking for food, and all of the counters had nothing but butchered pig flesh. Little American girls were dressed like cartoon princesses and ballerinas, and took great ferocious bites of raw pig, and laughed with their mouths open. Just as I was about to leave, a row of writing students blocked my path, saying, "You can eat with us, come, eat with us," but I could not see their eyes behind their reading glasses. I said I had to go write, and they laughed, "But what do you know?" and they turned from me, and they all had the curly tails of swine.

N1W

Hayley Pierpont

From the growling corners of Brixton pubs,
To Park Crescent's posh and pretty shrubs,
To the drag queens that sing and gleam through Soho clubs,
Past the pigeons and the tourists of Trafalgar Square,
And sitting across from a lovely goth smoking
In a Camden lair.

Oh fair London, you brick and steel minx,
You've got claws that cut and lights that wink.
People march through your boroughs and mews,
Black, white, gay, veiled, tattooed
All one tribe and pledged
To a different kind of red, white, and blue.

London, Londres
From Finchley to Waterloo,
Your people can be measured up in queues.
And I am a smudge on a crowded street,
Amongst strangers I will never meet.

Landscape built on soot and hustle,
As vivid to me now as if made from
My own bone or muscle.
The prim little audio warns 'mind the gap,'
But I've discovered I've become a sap
For warm Scotch eggs,
Motown,
Loose cloths,
A shared comb
A boy who smells like home.

London, Londra
Give me the chill
That can only be found atop Primrose hill
And I will meet you there.

A MARRIAGE OF MINDS

Amy Bareham

A VHS

It is a truth universally acknowledged (by me, myself, and I) that Jane Austen presides over certain, unforgettable chapters of life; she is a matriarchal presence with a maxim for every occasion. Like many others, I latched onto one Austen tale in particular. *Pride and Prejudice* became very much alive for me, alive in a way that made it nearly impossible to separate the story from Austen and me from her. It was a trinity birthed in the warmth of a lemon yellow womb from my perch on a checkered couch. Rain beat against the windows of our family room and Mama called it a "*Pride and Prejudice* day."

We were British transplants, new to the States and new to family rooms, but easy acquaintances with homesickness. When that VHS began its six hour marathon and the BBC logo rippled across the screen, Mama felt England envelop her. The piano runs from those opening credits are an anthem for us both.

My first viewing was an initiation into a mysterious world of grown up people and problems. In a film adaptation that is refreshingly accurate, five sisters depict varying shades of femininity. Together, they pursue marital bliss, which is not, apparently, the same thing as a large fortune. The narrative is famed for its audacious heroine, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, and her suitor, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Their courtship is iconized by the literary and the not so literary alike—maybe because, as Mr. Bennet says, "a girl likes to be crossed a little in love now and then. It is something to think of." At five years old, I was enthralled, and I'm not sure who I fell more in love with, Elizabeth or Darcy.

Jennifer Ehle played a seductively defiant Elizabeth. Milky skin. Arched brows. Locked jaw. Her posture screamed haughty,

but her eyes were kind. And that Colin Firth. His Mr. Darcy was the sort of Prince Charming they didn't write into children's fairytales. Through it all, my mama stood ironing in the corner—Austen and crisp sheets, therapy for the soul.

Then I grew up. My personal reverence for the story was just as devout as ever, but I soon discovered the plethora of teenage girls obsessed with finding their own Darcy. My beloved Colin Firth was reduced to a brooding, gentlemanly sex god better suited to the erotic fantasy of a Harlequin novel. Complete infatuation with Colin is inescapable; I'll concede to that (especially for the average British woman who lauds him, like Americans do George Clooney.) However, drooling is not becoming, and, I was adamant, not the reaction Austen intended.

The Bennets and their respective love interests—or lack thereof, apologies Mary—are intriguing, yes. From Mr. Wickham, a wolf in uniform, to Mr. Bingley, a lamb by comparison, Austen wastes no archetype. Her purpose, though, is to remind us of the unrivaled affections of a sister, the duties of a daughter, and the power of persuasion. This is why Austen endures. She never asked us to make trophies of our Darcys, Bingleys, and Wickhams, mounting them on the wall like helpless stags as testament to the hunt. Of course *Pride and Prejudice* allures us with the romance of romance, but the frivolity is not supposed to entice us. Austen roots us in reason. It's why she mocks the gossip and erects pedestals for the wise.

So I hosted sleepovers and let the VHS loose. Slowly but surely, I won friends over. Instead of panting at the mere sight of Darcy wading through the water, they began to feel it, too. How a day can be a *Pride and Prejudice* day.

A Novel

Sophomore year of college, Austen really got inside my head. She was a figment somewhere in a corner of my imagination, sitting—waiting—on a tasteful settee, hoping I would soon indoctrinate myself. I'd read about her life, even read her other novels, but I'd never actually read it. This instigated an identity crisis of the "am I a worthy English student" kind, like somehow,

my preoccupation with the film negated my intellectual capacity to appreciate the book. I needed to give Austen the chance not to disappoint me like I'd disappointed me. So one weekend, I threw myself at *Pride and Prejudice* with equal amounts passion and apprehension.

The novel triumphed. Its assembly was careful, laced with wit, and I understood those nuances reserved for the mature reader: 'I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love!' 'I have been used to consider poetry as the food of love,' said Darcy.

When I closed the book, I was left with a lack of resolution—that and a dog-eared text attacked most ardently by a highlighter. Austen proved to me that she cannot be contained. Elizabeth and Darcy's celebrity transcends the page because Austen herself defies the limits of the medium. A new chapter began that day, one in which I was inspired by the eternal truth of a deceased spinster's words.

A DVD

Except Austenian spinsterhood was not for me. It was during that same sophomore year that I finally embraced Joe Wright's 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation and met my future husband. The new movie was a Christmas present I begrudgingly brought back to school with me. I was still peeved that our VHS player retired to a cardboard box in the attic, broken and unable to run that six hour marathon anymore.

Wright's film surprised me—surprised me in the same way a friend might when deciding to go in for Botox or a nose job. The whole thing felt familiar but detached. Younger, tighter, sleeker. What was I to make of this Kiera Knightly person as Elizabeth Bennet? (It took me a solid three views to get past Knightley's teeth... don't judge me; you know exactly what I'm talking about.) Then I surrendered. I concluded that the 1995 work preserved the novel's literary integrity while the 2005 remake simplified—and therefore beautified—it. In return for length and Colin Firth, I was given breathtaking cinematography and Dario Marinelli's score. Joe Wright even captured those details imagined but never

reproduced with a minimal BBC budget: the smirks, clenched fists, and shivers.

Not long after I reconciled myself to a marriage of '95 and '05, he walked into my life. My own Mr. Darcy. Within our first few dates, I already knew his favorite chick-flick. We watched that intricate dalliance between Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam on a quiet August evening. When he said goodbye, we stood in a soft summer rain and he kissed me for the first time. I was fairly certain Joe Wright couldn't have planned it better. We were engaged five months later.

Sacred moments like the kiss were reason enough for me to pass on a Jane Austen seminar this fall. I'm sure I would have learned plenty about Austen's characterization of the middleclass female. I simply didn't, and don't, want to hear it. Too precious is the hush that descends when all is said and done, Elizabeth married and Darcy content. I refuse to sacrifice such intimacy with my literary family.

Jane Austen's legacy, for me, is intertwined in each *Pride and Prejudice* day. Perhaps you are wondering how you'll know when they arrive. Often, they are dismally gray and ordinary. Sometimes they are accompanied by a yearning for infinite cups of tea. Usually, they coincide with a desire to go home. And if I can offer just one more truth personally acknowledged, it is this: when a writer's voice sounds like home, we must visit often. We can and should cocoon ourselves away in good storytelling that speaks to a place down deep.

ROYALLY SCREWED

Kealey High

Queenspocalypse Contest Winner!

It was a day like any other. I had woken up late, grabbed some semi-clean clothes that were strewn about my room and rushed off to my chemistry class. I don't know whose idea it was to have a chemistry class at the freaking butt crack of dawn, but whatever. I mean, I'm a biochemistry major so I positively adore science, but 9:00 a.m. classes still feel too early.

I swiped my ID card with my dorky picture on it in front of the sensor on Rogers, my name "Jessica Lewis" in bright white letters stark against the blue background. I rush up the stairs of Rogers, and barreled my way down the hallway. I skid to a stop outside of the classroom and paused to compose myself a bit. Taking a deep breath, I quietly pushed open the door.

Well, at least that's what I tried to do.

The door screeched open like some ungodly harpy, fresh out of hell and on a warpath. The class groaned collectively, some attempting to cover their ears, while others simply grimaced. I winced and whispered "Sorry," before rushing to my seat.

The professor, used to my late antics, rolled his eyes and continued lecturing.

I dug my notebook out of my bag and flipped to a fresh page. I was reaching for a pen when a snickered "way to go Jess," came from my left. I whipped my head around to glare at Richard, my best friend since freshman year, who was currently holding back laughter.

"Yeah, whatever. I can't help that the door was loud," I muttered, rolling my eyes.

Richard raised an eyebrow in response, so I kicked him under the table. He yelped, and I couldn't help but laugh.

A deliberate cough came from the front of the room, and

Richard and I snapped our gazes forward towards the source. Our professor was giving us an expectant look. I smiled sheepishly before glancing down, picking up my pen obediently.

"Busted," the guy behind us sneered.

"Shut up Jerry!" Richard hissed.

The rest of the class period dragged by. It was a blur of equations and chemicals, and it felt like it would never end. That is, until the lights went out.

"Hmm?" the professor questioned. "We have plenty of backup generators, why are the lights out?"

Everyone glanced around in confusion. He did have a good point. In the past, if the electricity ever went out, the backup generators brought the lights back up in an instant. It had been nearly a full two minutes, and it was still dark except for the light filtering in through the open blinds. Which, now that I notice it, seemed a bit... green?

I must just be tired. I shook my head, and looked back to the professor. "Well, it's almost time for class to be over anyways. So we will pick up with chapter thirteen next time, okay?"

Everyone cheered and quickly started to grab their things. As people started to file out, I couldn't help but glance back towards the windows. The light still had that weird, almost greenish tint to it.

I was shaken from my thoughts by a hand landing on my shoulder. I followed that hand up to see Richard's larger-than-life glasses reflecting the greenish light from the windows.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, uh, nothing," I lied, as I swiftly grabbed my things and stood up. "Want to go grab something to eat? I'm starving!"

Richard threw back his head and laughed. "Of course! Let's go!"

We walked through the corridors of Rogers, bickering back and forth about where to eat. I wanted to go to Einstein's, but Richard wanted to simply go to the cafeteria. I snorted and told him, "Only the bravest people eat there," as I went to walk out of Rogers.

"Wait!" cried out a voice from behind me, "Don't go out

there!" I whirled around to see Hannah, a senior who was well-known by all science majors, looking frantic.

"And why not?" Richard confusedly asked.

"Just look out there! It's a mad house!" Hannah shouted. Richard and I turned and looked out the glass door.

Oh.

My.

GOD.

It looked like pure anarchy outside! The air was thick with green smoke, and people were rushing around like crazy, screeching out what seems to be battle cries. "Nursing for life," one girl screamed as she threw a giant pre-med textbook at another student.

A mob of students were chanting "Psychology major or bust," while climbing like mad into and on top of the fountain, while a guy with a guitar strummed angrily, belting out battle songs themed around being a music therapy major. Two other guys were attempting to chase down the campus squirrels, shouting that they were "pre-vet majors" and that they were going to "tame the squirrels."

I backpedaled from the door in shock, grabbing Richard and pulling him back as well. "What the hell?" he gasped, "It's like... the apocalypse or something!"

"No," a voice says behind us, "it's the Queenspocalypse."

We jumped and turned around to see none other than Jerry from chemistry behind us, staring at the mess outside.

"Damn it Jerry! This isn't the time for stupid jokes! We have to do something," I shouted.

"It's the generators; they've malfunctioned and started producing this strange green smoke," Hannah began to explain. "I'm not quite sure what this chemical is, but it seems to have caused people to become irrationally angry. The weirdest thing is that everyone has seemed to form packs of sorts, but only with people in the same major. Even the sororities have split. That's when you know it's serious."

"And how do you know all of this?" I asked. This all seems too surreal. I just wanted to get something to eat, maybe do a bit of

homework for once, but no! The freaking apocalypse had to start!

"I was in the greenhouse when it happened, so I saw everything. The green smoke seems to be coming from the generator in Trexler," she said sadly.

"Wait, but why aren't we attacking each other then? I mean, I know Jess and I are both biochemistry majors, but what about you two?" Richard questioned.

"Me too," Jerry said excitedly.

"Same here," Hannah announced. "It seems the smoke only affects those who breathe it in. And while it does leak into this building, it's not nearly potent enough to affect us."

I glanced around at my fellow biochemistry majors, before jumping at a particularly loud scream from outside. "We have to stop this," I exclaimed.

Hannah nodded and gestured towards one of the labs. She used her card to get access to the lab, as she has access to practically all of the Rogers building. She is a well-known senior due to all of the scientific research she's done, so I was glad that I was stuck with her during this whole mess. We all followed her into the room where she began to grab various objects from the cabinets.

"We need to go fix that generator, and to do that we need to get into Trexler. Everyone needs to put on safety goggles and lab coats."

I picked up a pair of safety goggles, and shrugged before putting them on. Richard was hooting in excitement, grabbing various pieces of equipment and shoving them into the pockets of his lab coat. I quickly reached over and snatched the amber bottle labeled 'Strong Acid' from his grip, and gave him a scolding look before placing it back on the counter. He huffed, before sulking off to look for other equipment. Meanwhile, Jerry still hadn't put the coat on yet, and was instead looking at it in disgust.

"Do we really have to do this?" he whined.

"Oh my God, have you never heard of general lab safety procedures? Just shut up and put it on Jerry!" Richard shouted from the other side of the room, grabbing and throwing safety goggles at Jerry, which unfortunately (or fortunately, depending

on how you looked at it) hit their target.

"Ow! Okay, geez," Jerry yelped.

Hannah rolled her eyes before walking up to us, an old box of face masks in her grip. She then started to describe in detail the plan to fix the generator. It involved a lot of running, and it had to go off without a hitch. To be honest, I was a little nervous to have the fate of Queens on my shoulders, but someone had to do it. With the plan known, we put on the face masks and walked up to the exit. I glanced around at our ragtag team, before securing the safety goggles and rushing forward.

"Biochemistry or bust," Richard screamed as we bolted out the door.

Normally I would've hit him for that, but I was more concerned with dodging the masses of students. There are people everywhere! I barely dodged a rather burly guy who was shouting to the sky about the "glory of the math major." I was panting by time we made it to Trexler, and quickly shut the doors behind us.

"Oh goodness, I didn't think we'd get here in one piece!" I gasped, trying to catch my breath. I knew I should have been going to the Fitness Center more often, but they just put the new season of Orange is the New Black on Netflix, so priorities you know?

"Crap! Richard!" Jerry suddenly yelled, before running outside.

I jolted up to see that Richard had been grabbed by one of the education majors, who was angrily muttering about "bad kids." I rush to the door, but before I could go out there, Jerry had already pushed the student into the fountain. He grabbed Richard and they both ran back into Trexler where Richard gave Jerry the most astounded, wide-eyed look I had ever seen.

"Th-thanks, man," Richard panted.

"Not that this bonding moment isn't nice, but we still have to fix that generator," Hannah reminded us firmly.

We all stood up, a bit shaken, but determined to set Queens back to normal. I glanced around to see that the hallway was empty, save for us. Hannah looked around before pointing off to a side hall where plumes of green smoke are coming from. I nod

towards her, and we all start off in that direction. The smoke was getting thicker by the moment, and soon it became hard to see. Everything was simply a green haze, and I stumbled a bit.

"Snap out of it! We're almost there!" Jerry yelled.

I shook my head and continued forward. Suddenly, I saw a huge chunk of metal, pouring out green smoke and beeping unhappily.

"There it is! Let's do this!" Richard exclaimed.

We stopped in front of this giant machine, and Hannah pulled out a large amount of tools. She threw open the machine before diving into the circuitry. I couldn't help but watch in awe as she rapidly snipped and reconnected various wires.

The sound of nails on bare tiles shocked me out of my trance. Startled, I looked up in fear at the doorway.

"What is that?" I asked, glancing to Richard and Jerry for a response.

"No...oh no!" Richard yelled, "I could recognize that sound anywhere! It's—"

Suddenly, we were swarmed on all sides, not by students but by...

Oh no.

Squirrels.

I guess the pre-vet majors were finally able to tame these crazed things, as they seemed in formation and were closing in on us.

"How much longer Hannah?" I shouted, stumbling backwards until my back was pressed against the generator.

"I need more time! Just a few more minutes," she yelled back.

"We don't have a few more minutes! Fix it now, or else we're all screwed," Jerry screamed in response, backed against the generator as well. The squirrels slowly started drawing closer, chattering and twitching their tails in annoyance.

"As soon as set foot on the campus I knew this is how I'd go out! Not by any cool battles, no, by these freaking squirrels!" Richard cried.

They were advancing rapidly, and I could hear Hannah cursing in frustration from inside the generator.

This was it. We really had no hope. I squeezed my eyes shut and waited for the inevitable. The sound of chittering grew louder and louder, until what sounds like the whole mass of squirrels surged forward.

I screamed and shot forward, eyes blearily trying to adjust to the bright light. I looked around in confusion. I was...in my bed?

I look around and sure enough, I was in my dorm room. I gave a breathless laugh and dropped back onto my bed. I couldn't believe it! I was safe, there was no apocalypse, and there were definitely no crazed squirrels. Talk about a crazy dream, right?

I reached up to run my hands through my hair when my fingers meet hard plastic.

What...?

I shakily grabbed the object, pulling it up and over my head. I almost didn't want to look, but I forced my eyes forward.

It was a pair of safety goggles.

Just like from the dream, the same pair from the dream, to be exact. But that couldn't be right! It was just a dream! It was nothing but a dream!

Right?

COMPELLING REASONS

Jena Aldridge

The inhale from the cigarette tip
Reminds me of your burning passion.
Helpless quivering legs must find some grip.

Breathe heavy like a hiking trip,
But my still beating heart cannot ration
The inhale from the cigarette tip.

This fierce hold you have upon my lip,
The fire burns in a senseless fashion
Helpless quivering legs must find some grip.

Clothes demolished from one rip,
Cheeks now blushed, undone from ashen
The inhale from the cigarette tip.

Your embrace as warm as the tea I sip,
Yes, intense and harsh; carpet-burnt compassion
Helpless quivering legs must find some grip.

Tainted after my enchanted dip,
Seductively mesmerized with satisfaction
The inhale from the cigarette tip.
Helpless quivering legs must find some grip.

IRISH WHISKEY

Danielle Price

I almost walked right by the bar.
The one on the corner of Kennedy and 5th.
The lights were barley on and the music low.

I sat down next to a man
His beard was full and wiry,
Voice gruff and his Jameson neat.

Large hands cupped his glass
And swirled the smooth malt.
He never spilled a drop.

My Grandfather once told me
The key to life –
"Eat richly, kiss often and
Don't put water in your whiskey."

LIFE'S CONTRASTS

Joi Pride

What is light without darkness? What is so unique about heat when there is no chill? How do people fully experience joy when they have never been in sorrow? Life is full of juxtapositions. One element that may seemingly contradict the other can be its greatest compliment. I see this most often when I visit my grandparents in Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia. Smith Mountain Lake is an area near Roanoke, Virginia. Its lake stretches out for forty miles, and around it are several mountains. The dramatic combination of a still lake and varied mountains has been proven to be a lovely spot for life to thrive.

The lake sits below the mountains. From a distance, it displays the gentlest tones of blue and green, but becomes clearer upon approach. When you look into the water, there is often only sand, sitting patiently at the bottom. Wherever the wind goes, the lake does follow, yet the water is never in a hurry. The water gracefully shifts from one place to another, and remains constant. It keeps itself within the bounds of the shore. There are no surprises.

You smell its freshwater scent fill the air as quickly as you approach it. The fragrance itself is refreshing, quenching a deep thirst you did not know you had. There, simply breathing becomes an experience. As you close your eyes to take it all in, you find there's even more to witness. You can hear the squawk of the birds, accompanied by the movement of the water when a breeze passes through. The air brushes past your face gently, like nature giving you a kiss. As the wind blows, children play at the beach, playfully squealing and splashing around under the sun.

There, nearly surrounding the lake, stand the mountains, coated by an army of trees of various kinds. Unlike the lake, the mountains themselves do not move. They stand there, high and

mighty, so that when standing from the lake, all eyes are lead directly upwards. You look up the patterns and shapes the trees leave on the mountains. They come in several greens—jade green, pine green, olive green. Completely covering the mountains, together they resemble a thick blanket. Now, as you get closer into the mountains themselves, you enter a completely different world. Stepping into the woods, you are immersed in the band of trees. All around you, you experience more than intense green. There are browns on the tree trunks and branches. There are small silver rocks alongside massive gray boulders.

This smell, similar to the lake, is fresh, but not quite as refreshing. The scent is much more dense and complicated, with a mixture of tree bark, leaves, and even animal droppings. The smell is contained by the trees keeping so close together, whereas out by the lake, everything is open, and the smells are left up to the wind. The sounds among the trees range from leaves rustling in every direction, to birds chirping, to deer running, to chipmunks scrambling away from your feet. Even textures are often more complex in mountains. For instance, the mountains them-selves are made up of a variety of different floorings. You may walk on fallen leaves that crunch each time you take a step or on soft green grass. At some point you will reach one of many dangerously steep parts, made entirely of solid rock which separates the forest from the long winding road that slithers through the hills. Some trees have thick bark, marked intensely up and down their trunks like battle scars, while others have thin bark wrapped around them.

Clearly the mountains and lake are extremely different settings—serene versus dense. Yet at the same time, the two support each other despite what we may see. Underneath every lake there is ground. That ground, nearing the bordering shores, elevates and comes up to join the shore. The shore runs up from the lake, and eventually becomes much steeper, turning into several mountains. The ground is like a bowl to the lake water, keeping it steady rather than scattered. The lake provides water to the life in and around it in the forests.

Together, the lake and mountains support each other, but also

complement each other visually. With nothing but flat lake, the scenery can become dull. With nothing but high mountainous regions, things become overwhelming. There has to be some type of balance, just as there needs to be balance in one's personal life. Our lives are full of heavy times and light ones. There are some points where we are constantly getting things done, versus times when we are simply at rest. Those who are almost never at rest become busybodies. They are overwhelmed and often overworked by the mountains that keep forming in their lives. On the contrary, those who rarely move ultimately become mentally still. Like the water, they are able to be thrown off course by even the slightest breezes their lives blow.

Nature is probably the most accurate representation of life there is. Even though the life of a flower and the life of a human are different, they are still lives nonetheless. They both are born, develop based on how well they are nurtured, and interact with their surroundings. So with this experience of Smith Mountain Lake, you can see what it looks like to have juxtaposition of two different things in a single lifetime. To be able to experience the many aspects of life, one must have some sort of balance between simplicity and complexity. There's a time and place for each.

A MOMENT

Ciara McTarsney

In a sudden moment,
on a Sunday evening,
I swiveled my head
to the back window and
caught the glimpse
of a yellow butterfly flitting
between two pine trees.

I thought,
if I had turned a second
later it would've been
only two trees
sweating in humidity,
not the delicate wings of
the closest earthly thing
to a floating angel.

WITH YOU

McKenzie Teter

Those were the days we loved to live.
Never wearing anything more than socks
And enough rain outside to keep us honest.

You always pitied the trees,
"They look so tired and cold."
If you could have, you would
Have taken them by the hand,
Invited them in for coffee,
But they never came.

You didn't mind Disappointment,
A friend who frequented your mind
"Company is company," you'd explain.

I'd smile an understanding smile
As you twirled offbeat to the rain ticking
Against the window; the rhythm of nature's clock.

ATOMIC NEIGHBORHOOD

Marissa Schrader

In the quaint painted puzzle of dead end alleyways and one-
way streets,
Where older folks chatter on the porches of their cracker-
jack houses
And fix ticking car engines in their lead-grape-peeling garage
...lopsided-eyed concrete lions and scatters of rabbits...
Wave and smile, although you

Are the passersby.
Bike wheels spin up brave, tarrying puddles
Of a certain world:
Everything in Miniature. You

Are moving faster than their radio-tuned reflections can
follow. You can't
Be caught in their cardboard collectible matchbox.

AMOUR

Brianna Imbrogno

Your kiss hit me like a cannonball to the chest,
and I was thrown into waters that stole my breath.
Your nails etched hymns into my back,
spelling out the name of God in strokes of red.
You played the sinews of my heart like strings on a harp,
and in the darkness of our room,
my chest heaved toward the sky.
No breath escaped from my lips
that had not tasted you that night,
and when I howled at the moon,
she cried back to me, "I am alive."

IF WINTER COULD APOLOGIZE TO SPRING

Jeffrey Scott

If Winter could apologize to Spring,
Might Winter be forgiven for cold stings
And long nights' ache? Might whispering wind
Die graciously in warmth, in dawn divine?

If Sorrow were a separate season—Glee—
Might we let Sorrow in for warmth? Might we
Welcome Sorrow's sudden luck and laugh
Like poetry at a good and gleeful life?

Would that it were so. Winter waits
For Spring, and Spring for Winter—such is fate
For seasons and sufferings, like rippling rivers
Phased meanly into ice for life to whither.

So, may it be that Winter's sorrow thaws
To Spring's mercy, to Spring's heartfelt awe.

A WARM WELCOME
Maxwell Millington

CALM WATERS
Ashley Porven

AN AFTERNOON ON THE CARIBBEAN
Margaret Nelson

BOYS & GIRLS
Virginia Scheer

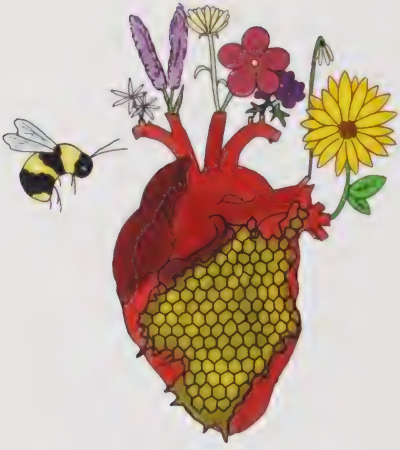
RUN
Naomi Fraher

ABSTRACT
Marissa Schrader

COCA-COLA
Sanela Ahmetovic

BEAUTIFULLY SELF-CONFIDENT
Joi Pride

REFLECT ON QUEENS
Virginia Scheer



HONEYCOMB HEART
Brianna Imbrogno

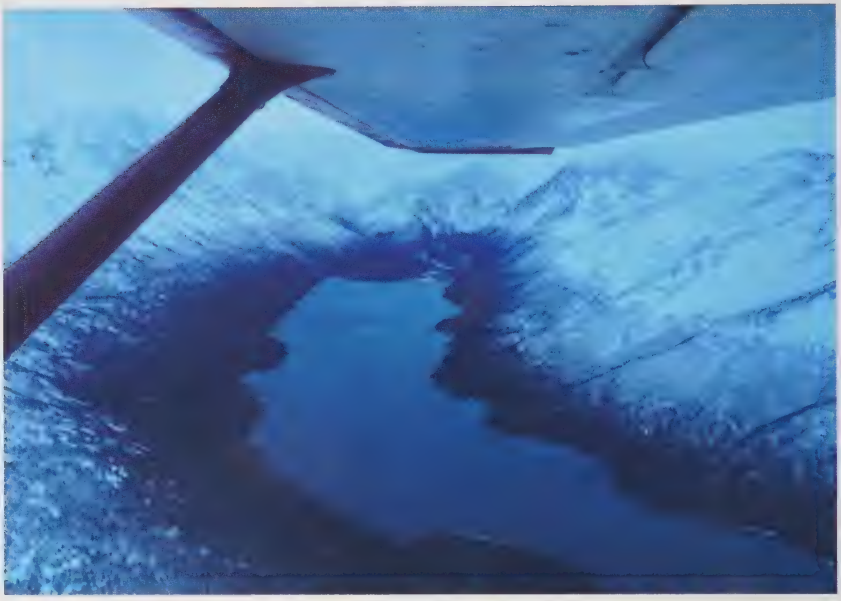
RAINY DAY AESTHETIC
Robert Rubino

CONEY ISLAND DREAMS
Naomi Fraher

DU TRONC
Nathan Williams

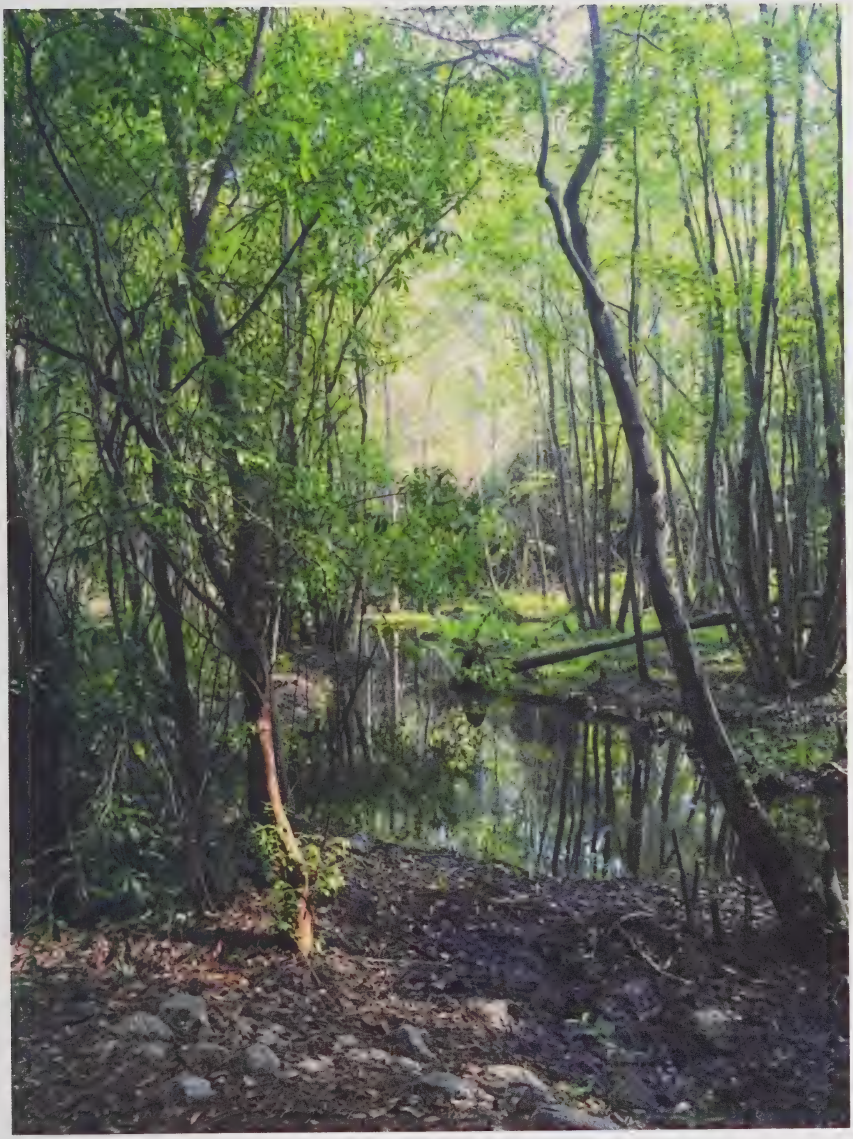
SILK WATERS
Erin Shiflett

LONDON FOG
Amy Bareham



BIRD'S EYE VIEW
Mara Hild-Ladebauche

SHEEP ISLAND
Margaret Nelson



THE FOREST
Robert Rubino

SERENITY
Ashley Porven

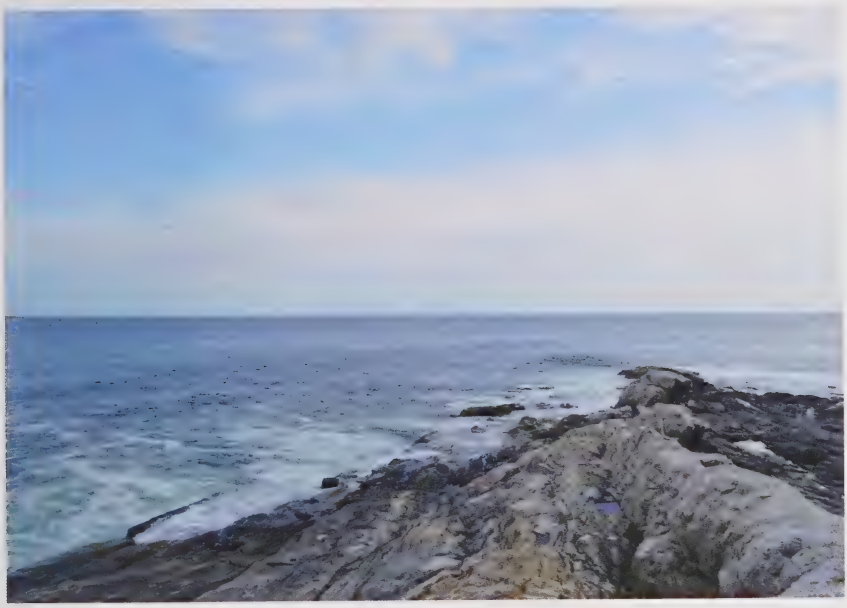
LIGHT TO THE NIGHT
Kathryn Johnston

MORNING VIEW
Mara Hild-Ladebauche

SECRET WINDOW
Naomi Fraher

REFLECTIVE LAKE
Robert Rubino

SEAGULL'S HUNT
Naomi Fraher

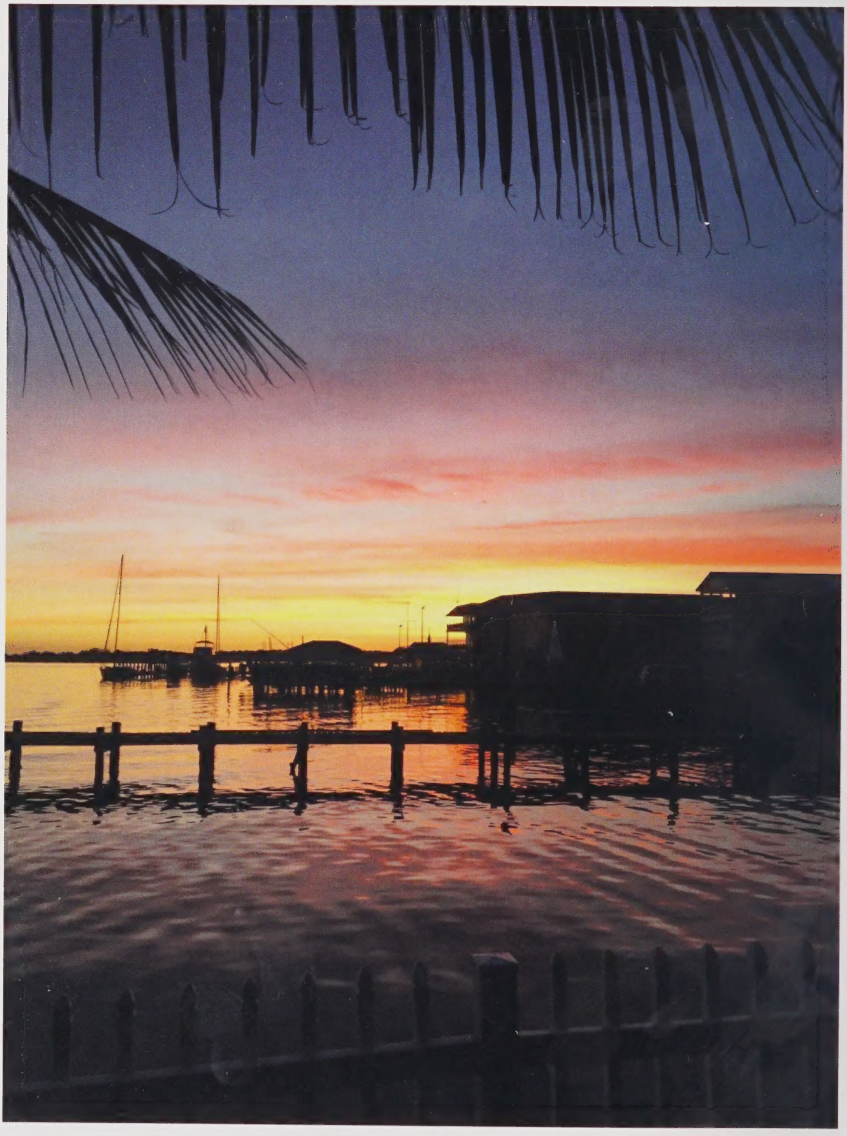


THE ENDLESS ATLANTIC
Kathryn Johnston

UK, LONDON.
Sanela Ahmetovic

A VENETIAN LANDSCAPE
Margaret Nelson

ALL THAT
Huong Trinh



SWANSBORO SUN
Erin Shiflett

So, may it be that Winter's sorrow thaws
To Spring's mercy, to Spring's heartfelt awe.

IF WINTER COULD APOLOGIZE TO SPRING
Jeffrey Scott

AN AFTERNOON ON THE CARIBBEAN
Margaret Nelson